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THE TENANTS OF MALORY.

BY J. S. LE FANU, AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," &c., &c.

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING TWO LADIES WHO SAT IN THE MALORY PEW.

There were tenants at last in Malory; and the curiosity of the honest residents of Cardyllian, the small and antique town close by, was at once piqued and mortified by the unaccountable reserve of these people.

For four years, except from one twisted chimney in the far corner of the old house, no smoke had risen from its flues. Tufts of grass had grown up between the paving-stones of the silent stable-yard, grass had crept over the dark avenue, which, making a curve near the gate, is soon lost among the sombre trees that throw a perpetual shadow upon it; the groves of nettles had spread and thickened among their trunks; and in the signs of neglect and decay, the monastic old place grew more than ever triste.

The pretty little Welsh town of Cardyllian stands near the shingle of a broad estuary, beyond which tower the noble Cambrian mountains, high and dim, tier above tier; undulating hills, broken by misty glens, and clothed with woods, rise from the opposite shore, and are backed, range behind range, by the dim outlines of Alpine peaks and slopes, and flanked by purple and gold-tinted headlands, rising dome-like from the sea.

Between the town and the gray shingle stretches a strip of bright green sward, the Green of Cardyllian, along which rows of pleasant houses, with little gardens in front, look over the sea to the mountains.

It is a town quaint, old, and quiet. Many of the houses bear date anterior to the great civil wars of England, and on the oak beams of some are carved years of grace during which Shakespeare was still living among his friends, in Stratford-on-Avon.

At the end of long Castle-street rise the battlements and roofless towers of that grand old feudal fortress which helped to hold the conquest of Wales for the English crown in the days of tabards, lances, and the long-bow. Its other chief street strikes off at right angles and up hill from this, taking its name from the ancient church, which, with its churchyard, stands divided from it by a low wall of red sandstone, surmounted by one of those tall and fanciful iron rails, the knack of designing which seems to be a lost art in these countries.

There are other smaller streets and by-lanes, some dark with a monastic stillness, others thinly built, with little gardens and old plum and pear trees

peeping over grass-grown walls, and here and there you light upon a fragment of that ancient town wall from which, in the great troubles which have helped to build up the glory of England, plumed cavaliers once parleyed with steel-capped Puritans. Thus the tints and shadows of a great history rest faintly even upon this out-of-the-way and serene little town.

The permanent residents of Cardyllian for half the year are idle, and for mere occupation are led to inquire into and report one another's sins, vanities, and mishaps. Necessity thus educates them in that mutual interest in one another's affairs, and that taste for narrative, which pusillanimous people call prying and tattle. That the people now residing in Malory, scarcely a mile away, should have so totally defeated them was painful and even irritating.

It was next to impossible to take a walk near Cardyllian without seeing Malory; and thus their failure perpetually stared them in the face.

You can best see Malory from the high grounds which, westward of the town, overlook the estuary. About a mile away you descry a dark and rather widespread mass of wood, lying in a gentle hollow, which, I think, deepens its sombre tint. It approaches closely to the long ripple of the sea, and through the foliage are visible some old chimneys and glimpses of gray gables. The refectory of the friary that once stood there, built of gray and reddish stones, half hid in ivy, now does duty as a barn. It is so embowered in trees, that you can scarcely, here and there, gain a peep from without at its tinted walls; and the whole place is overhung by a sadness and seclusion that well accord with its cloistered traditions. That is Malory.

It was Sunday now. Over the graves and tombstones of those who will hear its sweet music no more, the bell had summoned the townsfolk and visiters to the old church of Cardyllian.

The little town boasts, indeed, a beautiful old church, Gothic, with side-aisles, and an antique stained window, from which gloried saints and martyrs look down, in robes as rich and brilliant as we see now-a-days only upon the kings and queens of our court cards. It has also some fine old monuments of the Verney family. The light is solemn and subdued. There is a very sweet-toned organ, which they say is as old as the reign of Charles I., but I do not know how truly. In the porch are hung in chains two sacrilegious round-shot, which entered the church when Cromwell's general opened his fire, in those days of sorrow when the liberties of England were in the throes of birth. Beside the brilliant stained window, engraven upon a brass plate, is a record of the same "solemn times," relating how certain careful men, to whom we are obliged, had taken down, enclosed in boxes, and buried, in hope of a typical resurrection, the ancient window which had for so long beautified "this church," and thus saved it from the hands of "violent and fanatical men."

When "the season" is still flourishing at Cardyllian, the church is sometimes very full. On the Sunday I speak of it was so. One pew, indeed, was quite relieved from the general pressure. It was the large panelled enclosure which stands near the communion rails, at the right as you look up the aisle toward the glowing window. Its flooring is raised a full foot higher than the surrounding level. This is the seat of the Verney family.

But one person performed his devotions in it, upon the day of which I speak. This was a tall, elegantly slight young man, with the indescribable air of careless fashion; and I am afraid he was much more peeped at and watched than he ought to have been by good Christians during divine service.

Sometimes people saw but the edge of his black whisker, and the waves of his dark hair, and his lavender-gloved hand resting on the edge of the pew. At other times—when, for instance, during the Litany, he leaned over with his arms resting on the edge of the pew—he was very satisfactorily revealed, and elicited a considerable variety of criticism. Most people said he was very handsome, and so, I think, he was—a dark young man, with very large, soft eyes, and very brilliant even teeth. Some people said he was spoiled by an insolent and selfish expression of countenance. Some ladies again said that his figure was perfect, while others alleged that there was a slight

curve—not a stoop, but a bend at the shoulder, which they could not quite sanction.

The interest, and even anxiety with which this young gentleman was observed and afterwards discussed, were due to the fact that he was Mr. Cleve Verney, the nephew, not of the present Viscount Verney, but of the man who must very soon be so, and heir presumptive to the title—a position in the town of Cardyllian, hardly inferior to that of Prince of Wales.

But the title of Verney, or rather the right claimant of that title, was then, and had been for many years, in an extremely odd position. In more senses than one, a cloud rested upon him. For strong reasons, and in danger, he had vanished more than twenty years ago, and lived, ever since, in a remote part of the world, and in a jealous and eccentric mystery.

While this young gentleman was causing so many reprehensible distractions in the minds of other Christians, he was himself, though not a creature observed it, undergoing a rather wilder aberration of a similar sort himself.

In a small seat at the other side, which seems built for privacy, with a high panelling at the sides and back, sat a young lady, whose beauty riveted and engrossed his attention in a way that seemed to the young gentleman, of many London seasons, almost unaccountable.

There was an old lady with her—a lady-like old woman, he thought her—slight of figure, and rubrically punctual in her up-risings, and down-sittings. The seat holds four with comfort, but no more. The oak casing round it is high. The light visits it through the glorious old eastern window, mellowed and solemnized—and in this chiar'oscuro, the young lady's beauty had a transparent and saddened character which he thought quite peculiar. Altogether he felt it acting upon him with the insidious power of a spell.

The old lady, for the halo of interest of which the girl was the centre, included her—was dressed, he at first thought, in black—but now he was nearly sure it was a purple silk.

Though she wore a grave countenance, suitable to the scene and occasion, it was by no means sombre—a cheerful and engaging countenance on the contrary.

The young lady's dress was one of those rich Welsh linseys, which exhibit a drapery of thick-ribbed, dark gray silk, in great measure concealed by a short but ample cloak or coat of black velvet—altogether a costume, the gravity of which struck him as demure and piquant.

Leaning over the side of his pew, Mr. Cleve Verney prayed with a remarkable persistence in the direction of this seat. After the Litany he thought her a great deal more beautiful than he had before it, and by the time the Communion service closed, he was sure he had never seen any one at all so lovely. He could not have fancied, in flesh and blood, so wonderful an embodiment of Guido's portrait of Beatrice Cenci. The exquisite brow, and large hazel eye, so clear and soft, so bold and shy. The face voluptuous, yet pure; funeste but innocent. The rich chestnut hair, the pearly whiteness, and scarlet lips, and the strange, wild, melancholy look—and a shadow of fate. Three-quarters, or full face, or momentary profile—in shade, now—in light—the same wonderful likeness still. The phantom of Beatrice was before him.

I can't say whether the young lady or the old observed the irregular worship directed towards their pew. Cleve did not think they did. He had no particular wish that they should. In fact, his interest was growing so strangely absorbing that something of that jealousy of observation which indicates a deeper sentiment than mere admiration, had supervened, and Mr. Cleve conducted his reconnoitring with slyness and caution.

That small pew over the way, he was nearly certain, belonged to Malory. Now Malory is a dower house of the Verneys. His own grandmother, the Venerable Dowager Lady Verney, as much to her annoyance the *Morning Post* respectfully called her, was at that time the incumbent. But though she held it with the inflexible gripe of an old lady whose rights were not to be trifled with, she would not reside, and the place was, as I have said, utterly neglected, and the old house very much out of repair.

Why, then, should the Malory pew be thus tenanted? These ladies, he had no doubt, sat there of right—for if the seat had been opened to the congregation at large, in the then state of pressure, it would have been filled. Could they possibly be of kindred to the Verneys, and sit where they did by virtue of an order from the Dowager?

So Cleve Verney began to count up cousins whom he had never seen, and left off no wiser.

Close by this dark Malory pew, is a small side-door of the church. There is another like it, a little lower down, in the opposite wall, not far from the Verney pew, and through these emerge thin files of worshippers, while the main column shuffles and pushes through the porch. So, when the Rector had pronounced his final blessing, Cleve Verney having improved the little silence that follows to get his hat and cane into his hand, glided from his seat before the mass of the congregation were astir, and emerging on the little gravel walk, stepped lightly down to the stone stile, from whence you command a view of every exit from the churchyard.

He stood with one foot upon it, like a man awaiting a friend, and looking listlessly toward the church. And as he loitered, a friend did turn up whom he very little expected to see. A young man, though hardly so young as Cleve—good-looking, decidedly, with light golden moustache, and a face so kind, frank, and merry, it made one happy to look at it.

"Ah! Sedley! I had not an idea. What brings you here?" said Cleve, smiling, and shaking his hand moderately, but keeping his large eyes steadily on the distant point at which he expected to see the unknown ladies emerge.

"Down here just for a day or two," answered Tom Sedley. "I was above you in the gallery. Did you see that beautiful creature in the Malory seat, right before you? By Jove, she's a stunning girl. There was an old woman with her. I think I never saw so beautiful a being."

Well, I did see a pretty girl at the other side of the church, I *think;* isn't *that* she?" said Cleve, as he saw the two ladies—the younger with one of those short black veils which nearly obliterate the face of the wearer behind the intricacies of a thick lace pattern.

"By Jove! so it is," said Sedley; "come along—let us see where they go."

They were walking almost solitarily, followed only by an old servant who carried their books, toward the entrance at the further side of the churchyard, a small door opening upon a flight of steps by which you descend into one of the deserted back-streets of Cardyllian.

Cleve and Sedley pursued as little conspicuously as possible. The quaint street into which the stone stairs led them follows the mouldering shelter of the old town wall.

Looking along the perspective of this street, if such the single row of small old houses confronting the dark ivied wall may be termed, the two young gentlemen saw the figures in pursuit of which they had entered it, proceeding in the direction of Malory.

"We mustn't get *too* near; let us wait a little, and let them go on," suggested Sedley in a whisper, as if the ladies could have overheard them.

Cleve laughed. He was probably the more eager of the two; but some men have no turn for confidences, and Cleve Verney was not in the habit of opening either his plans or his feelings to anyone.

CHAPTER II.

ALL THAT THE DRAPER'S WIFE COULD TELL.

THIS street in a few hundred steps emerging from the little town changes its character into that of a narrow rural road, overhung by noble timber, and descending with a gentle curve toward the melancholy woods of Malory.

"How beautifully she walks, too! By Jove, she's the loveliest being I ever beheld. She's the most perfectly beautiful girl in England. How I wish some d—d fellow would insult her, that I might smash him, and have an excuse for attending her home."

So spoke enthusiastic Tom Sedley,

as they paused to watch the retreat of the ladies, leaning over the dwarf stone wall, and half hidden by the furrowed stem of a gigantic ash tree.

From this point, about a quarter of a mile distant from Malory, they saw them enter the wide iron gate and disappear in the dark avenue that leads up to that sombre place.

"*There!* I *said* it was Malory," exclaimed Sedley, laying his hand briskly on Cleve's arm.

"Well, I hope you're pleased; and tell me, now, what stay do you make at Cardyllian, Tom? Can you come over to Ware—not to-morrow, for I'm not quite sure that I shall be there, but on Tuesday, for a day or two?"

No—Tom Sedley couldn't. He must leave to-morrow, or, at latest, on Tuesday morning; and, for to-day, he had promised to go to afternoon service with the Etherges, and then home to tea with them. He was to meet the party on the Green.

So after a little talk, they turned together toward the town; and they parted near the Verney Arms, where Cleve's dog-cart awaited him. Having given his order in the hall, he walked into the coffee-room, in which, seated demurely, and quite alone, he found stout Mrs. Jones, the draper's wife—suave, sedate, wearing a subdued Sabbath smile upon her broad and somewhat sly countenance.

Her smile expanded as Cleve drew near. She made a great and gracious courtesy, and extended her short fat hand, which Cleve Verney took and shook—for the tradition of homelier, if not kindlier times, still lingered in Cardyllian, and there were friendly personal relations between the great family and the dozen and a half of shopkeepers who constituted its commercial strength.

So Cleve Verney joked and talked with her, leaning on the back of a chair, with one knee on the seat of it. He was pleased to have lighted upon such a gossip as good Mrs. Jones, the draper, who was waiting for the return of her husband, who was saying a word to Mr. Watkyn Hughes, in the bar, about a loan of his black horse for a funeral next morning.

"So it seems Lady Verney has got a tenant in Malory?" he said at last.

"Yes, *indeed*, sir," she replied, in her most confidential manner; "and I *hope*—I do *indeed*—it may turn out such a thing as she would like."

Mrs. Jones usually spoke in low and significant tones, and with a mystery and caution worthy of deeper things than she often talked about.

"Why, is there anything odd?" asked the young gentleman curiously.

"Well, it is *not*, now, *altogether* what I would *wish* for Lady Verney. I haven't seen any of the Malory family, excepting in church to-day; not one, indeed, sir; they are very strange; they never *come* into the town—not once since ever they came to Malory! but *dear* me! you know, sir, that might *be*, and yet everything as we could wish, mightn't it; yes, sure; still, you know, people *will* be *talking;* it's a pity we don't mind our own business more, and let others be, isn't it, sir?"

"Great pity; but—but what's the matter?" urged Cleve Verney.

"Well, Master Cleve, you know Cardyllian, and how we *do talk* here; I don't say *more* than *other* places, but we *do*, and I do not like *repeatin'* everything I hear. There's more mischief than good, *I* think, comes of repeatin' stories."

"Oh! come, pray what's the good of a story except to repeat it? I ought to know, perhaps I should tell Lady Verney about it," said Cleve, who was really curious, for nothing could be more quiet than the get up and demeanour of the ladies.

"They haven't been here, you know, very *long*," murmured Mrs. Jones, earnestly.

"No, I *don't* know. I know nothing about it; *how* long?"

"Well, about five weeks—a little more; and we never saw the gentleman once; he's never been down to the town since he came; never, indeed, sir, not once."

"He shows his sense; doesn't he?"

"Ah, you were always pleasant, Master Cleve, but you don't think *so;* no, you don't *indeed;* his conduct is *really most singular*, he's never been outside the walls of Malory all that time, in the *daylight*; very odd; he has hired Christmass Owen's boat, and he goes out in it *every night*, unless twice, the wind was too high, and Owen didn't choose to venture his boat. He's a *tall* man. Christmass Owen says, and holds himself

straight, like an officer, for people *will* be making *enquiries*, you know; and he has *gray* hair; not *quite* white, you know."

"How *should* I know?"

"Ah, ha, you were always *funny;* yes, indeed, but it *is* gray, gone *quite* gray, Christmass Owen says."

"Well, and what about the ladies?" enquired the young gentleman. "*They're* not gone gray, *all?* though I shouldn't wonder much, in Malory."

"The *ladies? Well.* There's *two*, you know; there's Miss Sheckleton, that's the elderly lady, and all the Malory accounts in the town is opened in her name. Anne Sheckleton, very reg'lar she is. I have nothing to say concerning her. They don't spend a great *deal*, you understand, but their money is *sure.*"

"Yes, of course; but, you said, didn't you? that there was something not quite right about them."

"Oh, dear, no, sir; I did not say quite *that;* nothing *wrong*, no sure, but very odd, sir, and most *unpleasant*, and that is all."

"And that's a good deal; isn't it?" urged Cleve.

"Well, it *is* something; it is *indeed* a great *deal*," Mrs. Jones emphasied oraculantly.

"And *what is* it, what do you know of them, or the people here what do they *say?*"

"Well, they say, putting this and that together, and some hints from the servant that comes down to order things up from the town, for servants, you know, will be talking, that the family is *mad.*"

"*Mad!*" echoed Cleve.

"That's what they say."

"The whole family are *mad!* and yet continue to manage their affairs as they do! By Jove, it is a comfort to find that people can get on without heads, on emergency."

"They don't say, no, dear me! that *all* that's in the house are mad; *only* the old man and the young lady."

"And what is she mad upon?"

"Well, they don't say. I don't know—melancholy I do suppose."

"And what is the old gentleman's name?"

"We don't *know*, the *servants* don't know, they say; they were hired by Miss Sheckleton, in Chester, and never saw the old gentleman, nor the young lady, till after they were two or three days in Malory; and one night comes a carriage, with a madhouse gentleman, they do say, a doctor, in charge of the old gentleman, and the young lady, poor thing! and so they were handed over by him, to Miss Sheckleton."

"And what sort of lunacies do they commit? They're not pulling down the house among them, I hope?"

"Very gentle—very. I'm told, quite, as you may say, *manageable.* It's a *very* sad thing, sir, but *what* a world it is! yes, indeed. Isn't it?"

"Ay, so it is.—I've heard that, I think, before."

"You may have heard it from *me*, sir, and it's long been my feeling and opinion, dear me! The longer I live the more melancholy sights I see!"

"How long is Malory let for?"

"Can't say, indeed, sir. That is they may give it up every three months, but has the right to keep it two whole years, that is if they *like*, you understand."

"Well, it *is* rather odd. It was they who sat in the Malory seat to-day?"

"That was Miss Sheckleton, was the old lady; and the young one, didn't you think her very pretty, sir?"

"Yes—she's pretty," he answered carelessly. "But I really could not see very well."

"I was very near as she turned to leave—before she took down her veil—and I thought what a really *beautiful* creature she was!"

"And what do they call her?"

"Miss Margaret, sir."

"Margaret! a pretty name—rather. Oh! here's Mr. Jones;" and Mr. Jones was greeted—and talked a little—somewhat more distantly and formally than his goodwife had done—and Mr. and Mrs. Jones, with a dutiful farewell, set off upon their Sunday's ramble.

CHAPTER III.

HOME TO WARE.

"MAD!" thought Cleve. "What an awful pity if she is. She doesn't *look* mad—melancholy she may. She does not look *a bit* mad. By Jove, I don't *believe* a word of it. It's utterly out of the question that the quiet old lady there could bring a mad girl to church with her. And thus resolved, Cleve walked out of the coffee-room, and awaiting his conveyance, stood on the steps of the Verney Arms, from whence he saw Wynne Williams, the portly solicitor of Cardyllian, and of a wide circle of comfortable clients round it. Wynne Williams is omniscient. Nothing ever happens in Cardyllian that he does not know with precision.

"Wynne," Cleve called up the quiet little street, and the attorney, looking over his fat shoulder, arrested his deliberate walk, and marched swiftly back, smiling.

So there was another greeting; and some more questions ensued, and answers, and then said Cleve—

"So Malory's let, I hear."

"Yes," said the attorney, with a slight shrug.

"You don't like the bargain, I see," said Cleve.

"It's a mismanaged place, you know. Lady Verney won't spend a shilling on it, and we must only take what we can get. We haven't had a tenant for five years till now."

"And who has taken it?"

"The Reverend Isaac Dixie."

"The devil he has. Why old Dixie's not mad, is he?"

"No, he's no fool. More like the other thing—rather. Drove a hard bargain—but *I* wouldn't take it myself at the money."

"Doesn't he live there?"

"No. There's an old gentleman and two ladies; one of them an old woman."

"And what's the old gentleman's *name*, and the young lady's?"

"Don't know, indeed; and what does it matter?" The attorney was curious, and had taken some little trouble to find out. "The Reverend Isaac Dixie's the tenant, and Miss Sheckleton manages the family business; and devil a letter ever comes by post here, except to Miss Sheckleton or the servants."

"Old Mother Jones, the draper's wife, over the way, says the girl and the old fellow are mad."

"Don't believe it. More likely he's in a fix, and wants to keep out of sight and hearing just now, and Malory's the very place to hide a fellow in. It's just *possible*, you know, there may be a screw loose in the upper works; but I don't believe it, and don't for the world hint it to the old lady. She's half mad herself about mad people, and if she took that in her head, by Jove, she'd never forgive me," and the attorney laughed uneasily.

"You do think they're mad. By Jove, you *do*. I *know* you think they're mad."

"I *don't* think they're mad. I don't know anything about them," said the good-humoured attorney, with Dundreary whiskers, leaning on the wooden pillar of the Verney Arms, and smiling provokingly in the young man's face.

"Come now, Wynne, I'll not tell the old lady, upon my honour. You may as well tell me all you know. And you *do* know; of *course*, you do; you *always* know. And these people living not a mile away! You *must* know."

"I see how it is. She's a pretty girl, and you want to pick up all about her, by way of enquiring after the old gentleman."

Verney laughed, and said—

"Perhaps you're right, though, I assure you, I didn't know it myself. But *is* the old fellow mad, or is there any madness among them?"

"I do assure you, I know no more than you do," laughed Mr. Wynne Williams. "He may be as sober as Solomon, or as mad as a hatter, for anything *I* know. It's nothing to me. He's only a visitor there, and the young lady, too, for that matter; and our tenant is the Reverend Isaac Dixie."

"Where is Dixie living now?"

"The old shop."

"I know. I wonder he has not wriggled on and up a bit. I always

looked on Dixie as the bud of a dignitary; he has had time to burst into a Bishop since I saw him. Dixie and I have had some queer scenes together," and he laughed quietly over his recollections. "He and I spent three months once together in Malory, do you remember. I dare say *he* does. He was tutor and I pupil. Charming time. We used to read in the gun-room. That was the year they had the bricklayers and painters at Ware. Do you remember the day you came in exactly as I shied the ink-bottle at his head. I dare say the mark's on the wall still. By Jove, I'd have killed him, I suppose, if I'd had the luck to hit him. You must come over and see me before I go. I'm quite alone; but I can give you a mutton chop and some claret, and I want to show you the rifle I told you of. You'll be delighted with it."

And so this young man, with large dark eyes, smiled and waved his farewell, and, with a groom behind him, drove at a rapid pace down the street, and away toward Ware.

"He'll do that seven miles in five and thirty minutes," thought the attorney, looking after him drowsily; and his speculation taking another turn, he thought mistily of his political possibilities, for he had been three years in the House, and was looked upon as a clever young man, and one who, having many advantages, might yet be—who could tell where, and have power to make the fortunes of many deserving attorneys.

Cleve meanwhile was driving at a great pace toward Ware. I don't suppose a town life—a life of vice, a life of any sort, has power to kill the divine spark of romance in a young man born with imagination.

Malory had always had a strange and powerful interest for him. A dower house now, it had once been the principal mansion of his family. Over it, to his eye, hung, like the sombre and glowing phantasms of a cloudy sunset, the story of the romance, and the follies and the crimes of generations of the Verneys of Malory. The lordly old timber that rise about its chimneys and gables, seemed to him the mute and melancholy witnesses of bygone tragedies and glories.

There, too, in the Steward's House, a veritable relic of the ancient Friary, lived dreamy old Rebecca Mervyn; he wondered how he had forgotten to ask whether she was still there. She had seemed to his boyish fancy one of those delightful German ambiguities—half human, half ghost; her silent presents of taffy, and faint wintry smile and wandering gaze, used to thrill him with "a pleasing terror." He liked her, and yet he would have been afraid to sit alone in her latticed room with that silent lady, after twilight. Poor old Rebecca! It was eight years since he had last seen her tall, sad, silent form—silent, except when she thought herself alone, and used to whisper and babble as she looked with a wild and careworn gaze over the sea, toward the mighty mountains that build it round, line over line, till swell and peak are lost in misty distance. He used to think of the Lady of Branksome Tower, and half believe that old Rebecca was whispering with the spirits of the woods and cataracts, and lonely headlands, over the water.

"Is old Rebecca Mervyn there still?" he wondered on. "Unless she's dead, poor thing, she *is*—for my grandmother would never think of disturbing her, and she shall be my excuse for going up to Malory. I ought to see her."

The door of her quaint tenement stood by the court-yard, its carved stone chimney top rose by the roof of the dower-house, with which, indeed, it was connected. "It won't be like crossing their windows or knocking at their hall door. I shan't so much as enter the court-yard, and I really ought to see the poor old thing."

The duty would not have been so urgent had the face that appeared in church that day been less lovely.

He had never troubled himself for eight years about the existence of old Rebecca. And now that the image, after that long interval, suddenly returned, he for the first time asked himself why old Rebecca Mervyn was ever there? He had always accepted her presence as he did that of the trees, and urns, and old lead statues in the yew walk, as one of the properties of Malory. She was a sort of friend or client of his grandmother's—not an old servant plainly, not even a housekeeper. There was an uncon-

scious refinement, and an air of ladyhood in this old woman. His grandmother used to call her Mrs. Mervyn, and treated her with a sort of distinction and distance that had in it both sympathy and reserve.

"I dare say Wynne Williams knows all about her, and I'll go and see her, at all events." So he thought as his swift trotter flew under the noble trees of Ware, along the picturesque road which commands the seaward view of that unrivalled estuary flanked by towering headlands, and old Pandillion, whose distant outline shews like a gigantic sphinx crouching lazily at the brink of the sea. Across the water now he sees the old town of Cardyllian, the church tower and the ruined Castle, and, further down, sad and sequestered, the dark wood and something of the grey front of Malory blurred in distance, but now glowing with a sort of charm that was fast deepening into interest.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE GREEN OF CARDYLLIAN.

WARE is a great house, with a palatial front of cut stone. The Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney seldom sees it. He stands next to the title, and that large residue of the estates which go with it. The title has got for the present into an odd difficulty, and cannot assert itself; and those estates are, pending the abeyance, compulsorily at nurse, where they have thriven, quite thrown off their ailments and incumbrances, and grown plethorically robust.

Still the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney is not, as the lawyers say, in perception of one shilling of their revenues. He feels indeed that he has grown in importance—that people seem more pleased to see him, that he is listened to much better, that his jokes are taken and laughed at, and that a sceptical world seems to have come at last to give him credit for the intellect and virtues of which he is conscious. All this, however, is but the shadow of the substance which seems so near, and yet is intangible.

No wonder he is a little peevish. His nephew and heir presumptive—Cleve—runs down now and then for shooting or yachting; but his uncle does not care to visit Ware, and live in a corner of the house. I think he liked the people of Cardyllian and of the region round about, to suffer and resent with him. So they see his face but seldom.

Cleve Verney sat, after dinner, at an open window of Ware, with one foot on the broad window-stone, smoking his cigar and gazing across the dark blue sheet of water, whose ripples glimmered by this time bright in the moonlight, toward the misty wood of Malory.

Cleve Verney is a young man of accomplishment, and of talents, and of a desultory and tumultuous ambition, which sometimes engrosses him wholly, and sometimes sickens and loses its appetite. He is conceited—affecting indifference, he loves admiration. The object for the time being seizes his whole soul. The excitement of even a momentary pursuit absorbs him. He is reserved, capricious, and impetuous—knows not what self-mortification is, and has a pretty taste for dissimulation.

He is, I think, extremely handsome. I have heard ladies pronounce him fascinating. Of course, in measuring his fascinations, his proximity to a title and great estates was not forgotten; and he is as amiable as a man can be who possesses all the qualities I have described, and is selfish beside.

Now Cleve Verney was haunted, or rather possessed, for the present, by the beautiful phantom—sane or mad, saint or sinner—who had for so long, in that solemn quietude and monotony so favourable for the reception of fanciful impressions, stood or sat, Nun-like, book in hand, before him that day. So far from resisting, he encouraged this little delirium. It helped him through his solitary evening.

When his cigar was out, he still looked out toward Malory. He was cultivating his little romance. He liked the mystery of it. "Margaret—Margaret," he repeated softly. He fancied that he saw a light for a

moment in the window of Malory, like a star. He could not be sure; it might be the light of a boat. Still it was an omen—the emblem of life—an answer of hope.

How very capricious all this was. Here was a young man, before whom yearly the new blown beauties of each London season passed in review—who fancied he had but to choose among them all—who had never experienced a serious passion, hardly even a passing sentiment—now strangely moved and interested by a person whom he had never spoken to—only seen—who had seemed unaffectedly unconscious of his presence; who possibly had not even seen him; of whose kindred and history he knew nothing, and between whom and himself there might stand some impassable gulf.

Cleve was in the mood to write verses, but that relief, like others, won't always answer the invocation of the sufferer. The muse is as coy as death. So instead, he wrote a line to the Rev. Isaac Dixie, of Clay Rectory, in which he said—

"My dear Dixie,

You remember when I used to call you "*Mr.* Dixie," and "*Sir.*" I conjure you by the memory of those happy days of innocence and Greek grammar, to take pity on my loneliness, and come here to Ware, where you will find me pining in solitude. Come just for a day. I know your heart is in your parish, and I shan't ask you to stay longer. The *Wave*, my cutter, is here; you used to like a sail (he knew that the Rev. Isaac Dixie suffered unutterably at sea, and loathed all nautical enjoyments), or you can stay in the house, and tumble over the books in the library. I will make you as comfortable as I can; only do come and oblige,

Your old pupil,
CLEVE VERNY.

P.S.—I shall be leaving this *immediately*, so pray answer in person, by return. You'll get this at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, at Clay. If you take the 11.40 train to Llwynon—you see I have my "Bradshaw" by me—you will be there at four, and a fly will run you across to Cardyllian in little more than an hour, and there you will find me, expecting, at the Chancery; you know Wynne Williams's old house in Castle-street. I assure you, I really do want to see you, *particularly*, and you must not fail me. I shan't detain you a moment longer than your parish business will allow. Heavens, what a yarn have I post-scribbled!"

He walked down to the pretty little village of Ware, which consists of about a dozen and a half of quaint little houses, and a small venerable church, situated by the road that winds through a wooded glen, and round the base of the hill by the shore of the moonlighted waters.

It was a romantic ramble. It was pleasanter, because it commanded, across the dark blue expanse, with its flashing eddies, a misty view, now hardly distinguishable, of Malory, and, pleasanter still, because his errand was connected with those tenants of old Lady Verney's, of whom he was so anxious to learn *any*thing.

When Tom Sedley, with the light whiskers, merry face, and kind blue eyes, had parted company that afternoon, he walked down to the green of Cardyllian. In the middle of September there is a sort of second season there; you may then see a pretty gathering of muslins of all patterns, and silks of every hue, floating and rustling over the green, with due admixture of

White waist-coats and black,
Blue waist-coats and gray,

with all proper varieties of bonnet and hat, pork-pie, wide-awake, Jerry, and Jim-Crow. There are nautical gentlemen, and gentlemen in Knickerbockers; fat commercial gents in large white waistcoats, and starched buff cravats; touring curates in spectacles and "chokers," with that smile proper to the juvenile cleric, curiously meek and pert; all sorts of persons, in short, making brief holiday, and dropping in and out of Cardyllian, some just for a day and off again in a fuss, and others daudling away a week, or perhaps a month or two, serenely.

It's hey-day of fashion has long been past and over; but though the "fast" people have gone elsewhere; it is still creditably frequented. Tom Sedley was fond of the old town. I don't think he would have reviewed the year at its close, with a comfortable conscience,

if he had not visited Cardyllian, "slow" as it certainly was, some time in its course.

It was a sunny Sunday afternoon, the green looked bright, and the shingle glittered lazily beyond it, with the estuary rippling here and there into gleams of gold, away to the bases of the glorious Welsh mountains, which rise up from the deepest purple to the thinnest gray, and with many a dim rift and crag, and wooded glen, and slope, varying their gigantic contour.

Tom Sedley, among others, showed his reverence for the Sabbath, by mounting a well brushed chimney-pot. No one, it is well established, can pray into a Jerry. The musical bell from the gray church tower, hummed sweetly over the quaint old town, and the woods and hollows round about; and on a sudden, quite near him, Tom Sedley saw the friends of whom he had been in search!

The Etherage girls, as the ancient members of the family still called them, were two in number. Old Vane Etherage of Hazelden, a very pretty place, about twenty minutes' walk from the green of Cardyllian, has been twice married. The result is, that the two girls belong to very different periods. Miss Charity is forty-five by the parish register, and Miss Agnes of the blue eyes and golden hair, is just nineteen and four months.

Both smiling after their different fashions, advanced upon Tom, who strode up to them with his chimney pot in one hand, and waving and kissing the other, and smiling prodigiously.

Miss Charity of the long waist, and long thin brown face, and somewhat goggle eyes, was first up, and asked him very volubly, at least eleven kind questions, before she had done shaking his hand, all which he answered them, laughing, and at last, said he—

"Little Agnes, are you going to cut me? How well you look! Certainly there's no place on earth like Cardyllian, for pretty complexions, is there?"

He turned for confirmation to the curiously brown thin countenance of Miss Charity, which smiled and nodded acquiescence, "You're going to-morrow, you say; that's a great pity; everything looking so beautiful."

"*Everything*," acquiesced Tom Sedley, with an arch glance at Agnes, who blushed and said merrily—

"You're just the same old fool you always were, Tom; and we don't mind one word you say."

"Aggie, my dear!" said her sister, who carried down the practice of reproof from the nursery; and it was well, I suppose, that Miss Aggie had that arbitress of proprieties always beside her.

"I suppose you have no end of news to tell me. Is anyone going to be married? Is anyone dying, or anyone christened? I'll hear it all by-and-bye. And who are your neighbours at Malory?"

"Oh, quite charming!" exclaimed Miss Agnes eagerly. "The most mysterious people that ever came to a haunted house. You know Malory has a ghost."

"Nonsense, child. Don't mind her, Mr. Sedley," said Miss Charity. "I *wonder* how you can talk so foolishly."

Oh, that's nothing new. Malory's been haunted as long as *I* can remember," said Tom.

"Well, I did not think Mr. Sedley could have talked like that!" exclaimed Miss Charity.

"Oh, by Jove, I *know* it. *Everyone* knows it that ever lived here. Malory's *full* of ghosts. None but very queer people could think of living there; and, Miss Agnes, you were going to say——"

"Yes, they are *awfully* mysterious. There's an old man who stalks about at night, like the ghost in "Hamlet," and never speaks, and there's a beautiful young lady, and a gray old woman who calls herself Anne Sheckleton. They shut themselves up so closely—you can't imagine. Some people think the old man is a maniac or a terrible culprit."

"Highly probable," said Tom; "and the old woman a witch, and the young lady a vampire."

"Well, hardly that," laughed Miss Agnes, "for they came to church to-day?"

"How you *can* both talk such folly," interposed Miss Charity.

"But you know they would not let Mr. Pritchard up to the house," pleaded Miss Agnes. Mr. Pitchard, the curate, you know"—this was to Tom Sedley—"he's a funny little man—he preached to-day—very good

and zealous, and all that—and he wanted to push his way up to the house, and the cross old man they have put to keep the gate, took him by the collar, and was going to beat him. Old Captain Shrapnell says he *did* beat him with a child's cricket-bat; but *he hates* Mr. Pritchard, so I'm not sure; but, at all events, he was turned out in disgrace, and blushes and looks dignified ever since whenever Malory is mentioned. Now, everyone here knows what a good little man poor Mr. Pritchard is, so it must have been sheer hatred of religion that led to his being turned out in that way."

"But the ladies were in church, my dear Aggie; we *saw* them, Mr. Sedley, *to-day;* they were in the Malory pew."

Oh, indeed?" said Tom Sedley, artfully; "and you saw them pretty distinctly, I dare say."

"The young lady is quite beautiful, *we* thought. I'm so sorry you were not in our seat; though, indeed, people ought not to be staring about them in church; but you would have admired her immensely."

"Oh, I saw them. They were the people nearly opposite to the Verney's seat, in the small pew? Yes, they *were*—that is, the young lady, I mean, was perfectly lovely," said little Tom, who could not with any comfort practise a reserve.

"See, the people are beginning to hurry off to church; it must be time to go," said Charity.

So the little party walked up by the courthouse into Castle-street, and so turned into quaint old Church-street, walking demurely, and talking very quietly to the solemn note of the old bell.

CHAPTER V.

A VISIT TO HAZELDEN.

They all looked toward the Malory seat on taking their places in their own; but that retreat was deserted now, and remained so, as Tom Sedley at very brief intervals ascertained, throughout the afternoon service; after which, with a secret sense of disappointment, honest Sedley escorted the Etherage "girls" up the steep road that leads through the wooded glen of Hazelden to the hospitable house of old Vane Etherage.

Everyone in that part of the world knows that generous, pompous, and boisterous old gentleman. You could no more visit Cardyllian without seeing Vane Etherage, than you could visit Naples without seeing Vesuvius. He is a fine portly bust, but little more. In his waking hours he lives alternately in his Bath chair and in the great leathern easy chair in his study. He manages to shuffle very slowly, leaning upon his servant on one side, and propped on his crutch at the other, across the hall of the Cardyllian Club, which boasts about six-and-thirty members, besides visiters, and into the billiard-room, where he takes possession of the chair by the fire, and enjoys the agreeable conversation of Captain Shrapnell, hears all about the new arrivals, who they are, what screws are loose, and where, and generally all the gossip and scandal of the little commonwealth of Cardyllian.

Vane Etherage had served in the navy, and, I believe, reached the rank of captain. In Cardyllian he was humourously styled "the Admiral," when people spoke *of* him, not *to* him; for old Etherage was fiery and consequential, and a practical joke which commenced in a note from an imaginary secretary, announcing that "The Badger's Hunt" would meet at Hazelden House on a certain day, and inducing hospitable preparations, for the entertainment of those nebulous sportsmen, was like to have had a sanguinary ending. It was well remembered that when young Sniggers of Sligh Farm apologised on that occasion, old Etherage had arranged with Captain Shrapnell, who was to have been his second, that the Admiral was to fight in his Bath chair—an evidence of resource and resolution which was not lost upon his numerous friends.

"How do you do, Sedley? Very glad to see you, Tom—very glad indeed, sir. You'll come to-morrow and dine; you must, indeed—and next day. You know our Welsh mutton

—you do—you know it well; it's better here than in any other place in the world—in the whole world, sir; the Hazelden mutton, and, egad, you'll come here—you shall, sir—and dine here with us to-morrow; mind, you shall."

The Admiral wore a fez, from beneath which his gray hair bushed out rather wildly, and he was smoking through an enormous hubble-bubble pipe as Tom Sedley entered his study, accompanied by the ladies.

"He says he's to go away to-morrow," said Miss Charity, with an upbraiding look at Sedley.

"Pooh—nonsense—not *he*—not *you*, Tom—not a bit, sir. We won't let you. Girls, we won't *allow* him to go. Eh?—No—no—you dine here to-morrow, *and* next day."

"You're very kind, sir; but I promised, if I am still in Cardyllian to-morrow, to run over to Ware, and dine with Verney."

"*What* Verney?"

"Cleve Verney."

"D—— him."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Miss Charity, grimly.

"Boh!—I *hate* him—I hate *all* the Verneys," bawled old Vane Etherage, as if hating were a duty and a generosity.

"*Oh*—no, papa—you *know* you don't—that would be *extremely wicked*," said Miss Charity, with that severe superiority with which she governed the Admiral.

"Begad, you're always telling me I'm wicked—and we know where the *wicked* go—that's catechism, I believe—so I'd like to know where's the difference between that and d—ing a fellow?" exclaimed the portly bust, and blew off his wrath with a testy laugh.

"I think we had better put off our bonnets and coats?—The language is becoming rather strong—and the tobacco," said Miss Charity, with dry dignity, to her sister, leaving the study as she did so.

"I thought it might be that *Kiffyn* Verney—the uncle fellow—Honorable Kiffyn Verney—*dis*-honorable, *I* call him—that old dog, sir, he's no better than a cheat—and I'd be glad of an opportunity to tell him so to his face, sir—you have no *idea*, sir, how he has behaved to me!"

"He has the character of being a very honorable man, sir—I'm sorry you think so differently," said honest Tom Sedley, who always stood up for his friends, and their kindred—"and Cleve—I've known from my childhood, and I assure you, sir, a franker or more generous fellow I don't suppose there is on earth."

"I know nothing about the jackanape, except that he's nephew of his roguish old uncle," said the florid old gentleman with the short high nose, and double chin. "He wants to take up Llanderis, and he *sha'nt have* it. He's under covenant to renew the lease, and the devil of it is, that between me and Wynne Williams we have put the lease astray—and I can't find it—nor *he* either—but it will turn up—I don't care twopence about it—but no one shall humbug me—I won't be gammoned, sir, by all the Verneys in England. *Stuff*—sir!"

Then the conversation took a happier turn. The weather was sometimes a little squally with the Admiral—but not often—genial and boisterous—on the whole sunny and tolerably serene—and though he sometimes threatened high and swore at his servants, they knew it did not mean a great deal, and liked him.

People who lived all the year round in Cardyllian, which from November to May, every year, is a solitude, fall into those odd ways and little self-indulgences which gradually metamorphose men of the world into humorists and grotesques. Given a sparse population, and difficult intercommunication, which in effect constitute solitude, and you have the conditions of barbarism. Thus it was that Vane Etherage had grown uncouth to a degree that excited the amazement of old contemporaries who happened, from time to time, to look in upon his invalided retirement at Cardyllian.

The ladies and Tom Sedley, in the drawing-room, talked very merrily at tea, while old Vane Etherage, in his study, with the door between the rooms wide open, amused himself with a nautical volume and his terrestrial globe.

"So," said Miss Agnes, "you admired the Malory young lady—Margaret, our maid says, she is called—very much to-day."

"I did, by Jove. Didn't you?"

said Tom, well pleased to return to the subject.

"Yes," said Agnes, looking down at her spoon—"Yes, I admired her; that is, her features are very regular; she's what I call extremely handsome; but there are prettier girls."

"*Here*, do you mean?"

"Yes—here."

"And who are they?"

"Well, I don't say here *now;* but I do think those Miss Dartmores, for instance, who were here last year, and used to wear those blue dresses were decidedly prettier. The heroine of Malory, whom you have fallen in love with, seems to me to want animation."

"Why, she couldn't show a great deal of animation over the Litany," said Tom.

"I did not see her then; I happened to be praying myself during the Litany," said Miss Agnes, recollecting herself.

"It's more than *I* was," said Tom.

"You ought not to talk that way, Mr. Sedley. It isn't *nice.* I wonder you can," said Miss Charity.

"I would not say it, of course, to strangers," said Tom. "But then, I'm so intimate here—and it's really true, that is, I mean, it was to-day."

"I wonder what you go to church for," said Miss Charity.

"Well, of course, you know, it's to pray; but I look at the bonnets a little, also; every fellow does. By Jove, if they'd only say truth, I'm certain the clergymen peep—I often saw them. There's that little fellow, the Rev. Richard Pritchard, the curate, you know—I'd swear I've seen that fellow watching you, Agnes, through the chink in the reading-desk door, while the sermon was going on; and I venture to say he did not hear a word of it."

"You ought to tell the rector, if you really saw that," said Miss Charity, severely.

"Pray, do no such thing," entreated Agnes; "a pleasant situation for me!"

"Certainly, if Mr. Pritchard behaves himself as you describe," said Miss Charity; "but I've been for hours shut up in the same room with him—sometimes here, and sometimes at the school—about the children, and the widows' fund, and the parish charities, and I never observed the slightest levity; but you are joking, I'm sure."

"I'm *not*, upon my honour. I don't say it's the least harm. I don't see how he can help it; I know if *I* were up in the air—in a reading-desk, with a good chink in the door, where I thought no one could see me, and old Doctor Splayfoot preaching his pet sermon over my head—*wouldn't* I peep?—that's all."

"Well, I really think, if he makes a habit of it, I *ought* to speak to Doctor Splayfoot. I think it's my *duty*," said Miss Charity, sitting up very stiffly, as she did when she spoke of duty; and when once the notion of a special duty got into her head, her inflexibility, as Tom Sedley and her sister Agnes knew, was terrifying.

"For mercy's sake, my dear Charry, do think of *me!* If you tell Doctor Splayfoot he'll be certain to tell it all to Wynne Williams and Doctor Price Apjohn, and every creature in Cardyllian will know everything about it, and a great deal more, before two hours; and once for all, if that ridiculous story is set afloat, into the church door I'll never set my foot again."

Miss Agnes' pretty face had flushed crimson, and her lip quivered with distress.

"How *can* you be such a fool, Aggie! I'll only say it was at *our seat*, and no one can possibly tell which it was at—you or I; and I'll certainly tell Doctor Splayfoot that Mr. Sedley saw it."

"And I'll tell the Doctor," said Sedley, who enjoyed the debate immensely, "that I neither saw nor said any such thing."

"I don't think, Thomas Sedley, you'd do anything so excessively wicked!" exclaimed Miss Charity, a little fiercely.

"Try me," said Tom, with an exulting little laugh.

"Every *gentleman* tells the truth," thrust she.

"Except where it makes mischief," parried Tom, with doubtful morality and another mischievous laugh.

"Well, I suppose I had better say nothing of *Christianity.* But what *you* do is your own affair! *my* duty I'll perform. I shall think it over; and I shan't be ruffled by any folly intended to annoy me." Miss Charity's thin brown cheeks had flushed to a

sort of madder crimson. Excepting these flashes of irritability, I can't charge her with many human weaknesses. "I'll not say *who* he looked at—I've promised that; but unless I change my present opinion, Doctor Splayfoot shall hear the whole thing to-morrow. I think in a clergyman any such conduct in church is *unpardonable.* The effect on other people is positively ruinous. *You,* for instance, would not have talked about such things in the light you do, if you had not been encouraged in it, by seeing a clergyman conducting himself so."

"Mind, you've *promised* poor little Agnes, you'll not bring her into the business, no matter what *I* do," said Sedly.

"I have, certainly."

"Well, I'll stay in Cardyllian to-morrow, and I'll see Doctor Splayfoot." Sedly was buttoning his coat and pulling on his gloves, with a wicked smile on his good-humoured face. "And I'll tell him that you think the curate ogles you through a hole in the reading-desk. That *you* like *him,* and *he's* very much gone about *you*; and that you wish the affair brought to a point; and that you're going to appeal to him—Doctor Splayfoot—to use his authority either to affect *that,* or to stop the ogling. I will, upon my honour!"

"And I shall speak to papa to prevent it," said Miss Charity, who was fierce and literal.

"And that will bring about a duel, and he'll be shot in his Bath chair, and I shall be hanged"—old Vane Etherage, with his spectacles on, was plodding away serenely at the little table by the fire, over his *Naval Chronicle*—"and Pritchard will be deprived of his curacy, and you'll go mad, and Agnes will drown herself like Ophelia, and a nice little tragedy you'll have brought about. Good night; I'll not disturb him"—he glanced toward the unconscious Admiral—"I'll see you both to-morrow, after I've spoken to the Rector." He kissed his hand, and was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

MALORY BY MOONLIGHT.

When Tom Sedly stepped out from the glass door on the gravel walk, among the autumn flowers and the evergreens in the pleasant moonlight, it was just nine o'clock, for in that primitive town and vicinage people keep still wonderfully early hours.

It is a dark and lonely walk, down the steep Hazelden-road, by the side of the wooded glen, from whose depths breaks and rises the noise of the mill-stream. The path leads you down the side of the glen, with dense forest above and below you; the rocky steep ascending at the left hand, the wooded precipice descending into utter darkness at your right, and beyond that, black against the sky, the distant side of the wooded ravine. Cheery it was to emerge from the close overhanging trees, and the comparative darkness, upon the high road to Cardyllian, which follows the sweep of the estuary to the high street of the town, already quiet as at midnight.

The moon shone so broad and bright, the landscape looked so strange, and the air was so frosty and pleasant, that Tom Sedly could not resist the temptation to take a little walk which led him over the Green, and up the steep path overhanging the sea, from which you command so fine a view of the hills and headlands of the opposite side, and among other features of the landscape, of Malory, lying softly in its dark and misty woodlands.

Moonlight, distance, hour, solitude, aided the romance of my friend Tom Sedly, who stood in the still air and sighed toward that antique house.

With arms folded, his walking-cane grasped in his right hand, and passed, sword fashion, under his left arm, I know not what martial and chivalric aspirations concerning death and combat rose in his good-natured heart, for in some temperaments the sentiment of love is mysteriously associated with the combative, and our homage to the gentler sex connects itself magnanimously with images of wholesale assault and battery upon the other. Perhaps if he could have

sung, a stave or two might have relieved his mind; or even had he been eloquent in the language of sentiment. But his vocabulary, unhappily, was limited, and remarkably prosaic, and not even having an appropriate stanza by rote, he was fain to betake himself to a cigar, smoking which he at his leisure walked down the hill toward Malory.

Halfway down, he seated himself upon the dwarf wall, at the roadside, and by the ivied stem of a huge old tree, smoked at his ease, and sighed now and then.

"I can't understand it—it is like some confounded witchcraft," said he. "I *can't* get her out of my head."

I dare say it was about the same time that his friend Cleve Verney was performing, though not with so sublime an enthusiasm, his romantic devotions in the same direction, across the flickering water, from Ware.

As he stood and gazed, he thought he saw a figure standing near the water's edge on the shingle that curves in front of Malory.

If a living figure, it was very still. It looked gray, nearly white, in the moon-light. Was there an upright shaft of stone there, or a post to moor the boats by? He could not remember.

He walked slowly down the road. "By Jove! I think it's moving," he said aloud, pulling up all at once and lowering his cigar. "No, it *isn't* moving, but it *did* move, I *think*—yes, it has changed it's ground a little—hasn't it? Or is it only my standpoint that's changed?"

He was a good deal nearer now, and it did look much more like a human figure—tall and slight, with a thin gray cloak on—but he could not yet be *quite* certain. Was there not a resemblance in the proportions—tall and slight? The uncertainty was growing intense; there was a delightful confusion of conjecture. Tom Sedly dropped his cigar, and hastened forward with an instinctive stealthiness in his eagerness to arrive before this figure—if such it were—should be scared away by his approach.

He was now under the shadow of the tall trees that over-hang the outer wall of Malory, and cast their shadows some way down upon the sloping shore, near the edge of which a tall female figure was undoubtedly standing, with her feet almost touching the ripple of the water, and looking steadfastly in the direction of the dim head-land of Pendillion, which at the far side, guards the entrance of the estuary.

In the wall of Malory, at some three hundred yards away from the gate, is a small door, a little sally-port that opens a nearly direct access from the house to the rude jetty where the boats are sometimes moored. This little door stood now wide open, and through it the figure had of course emerged.

Tom Sedly now for the first time began to feel a little embarrassed. The general privacy of the place, the fact that the jetty, and in point of law the strand itself, here, belonged to Malory, from which the private door which still stood open, shewed that the lady had emerged—all these considerations made him feel as if he were guilty of an impertinence, and very nearly of a trespass.

The lady stood quite still, looking across the water. Tom Sedly was upon the road that skirts the wall of Malory, in the shadow of the great trees. It would not have done to walk straight across the shingle to the spot where the lady stood, neither could he place himself so as to intercept her return to the doorway, directly, so, as a less obvious stratagem, he made a detour, and sauntering along the water's edge like a man intent solely on the picturesque, with a beating heart he approached the female, who maintained her pose quite movelessly until he had approached within a few steps.

Then she turned, suddenly, revealing an old and almost agonized face, that looked, in the intense moonlight, white, and fixed as if cut in stone. There is something ludicrous in the sort of shock which Tom Sedly experienced. He stood staring at the old lady with an expression which, if she had apprehended it, would not have flattered her feminine self-esteem, if any of that good quality remained to her.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the old woman, with a nervous eagerness, drawing near. "But, pray, can *you* see a sail in that direction, a yawl, sir, they call it, just *there?*"—she pointed—"I fancied about two miles

beyond that vessel that lies at anchor *there?* I can't see it now, sir, can *you?*"

She had come so close that Sedly could see not only the deep furrows, but the finely etched wrinkles about the large eyes that gazed on him, and from him to the sea, with an imploring stare.

"There's no sail, ma'am, between us and Pendillion," said Sedly, having first raised his hat deferentially, for did not this strange old lady with her gray mantle drawn over her head, nevertheless, represent Malory, and was not Malory saddened and glorified by the presence of that beautiful being whom he had told himself a thousand times since morning service, he never, *never* could forget."

"Ha, ha! I thought I saw it, exactly, sir, in *that* direction; *pray* look more carefully, sir, my old eyes tire, and fail me."

"No, ma'am, positively nothing there. How long ago is it since you first saw it?"

"Ten—twenty—minutes, it must be."

"A yawl will run a good way in that time, ma'am," said Tom with a little shake of his head, and a smile. "The yawl they had at Ware last year would make eight knots an hour in this breeze, light as it is. She might have been up to Bryll by this time, or down to Pendrewist, but there's no sail, ma'am, either way."

"Oh! sir, are you very sure?"

"Quite sure, ma'am. No sail in sight, except that brig just making the head of Pendillion, and that can't be the sail you saw, for she wasn't in sight twenty minutes since. There's nothing more, ma'am, except boats at anchor."

"Thank you, sir," said the lady, still looking across the water, and with a deep sigh. "No, I suppose there's none. It sometimes happens to me, fancy, I suppose, and long expectation, from my window, looking out. It's a clear view, between the trees, across the bay to Pendillion; my eyes tire, I think; and so I fancy I see it. Knowing, that is, feeling so very sure, it will come again. Another disappointment for a foolish old woman. I sometimes think it's all a dream." She had turned and was now stumbling over the large loose stones toward the door. "Foolish dreams—foolish head—foolish old head, yet, sir, it *may* be that which goes away may come back, all except life. I've been looking out that way," and she turned and moved her hand towards the distant headlands. "You see nothing?"

"No *sail*, ma'am," answered Tom.

"No, no sail," she repeated to the shingle under her feet, as she picked her steps again homeward.

"A little longer—another wait; wait patiently. Oh! God, how slowly years and months go over!"

"May I see you to the door, ma'am?" asked Tom Sedley, prosaically. The old lady, thinking, I dare say, of other things, made him no answer, a silence which he accepted as permission, and walked on beside her, not knowing what to say next, and terribly anxious to hit upon something, and try to found an acquaintance. The open door supplied him.

"Charming place this Cardyllian, ma'am. I believe no one ever was robbed in it. They leave their doors open half the night, just like that."

"Do they, indeed?" said she. I think she had forgotten her companion altogther in the interval. "I don't remember. It's fifteen years and upwards, since I was there. I live here, at Malory." She nodded, and raised her eyes to his face as she spoke.

Suddenly she stopped, and looked at him more earnestly in silence for some seconds, and then said she—

"Sir, will you forgive me? Are you related to the Verneys?"

"No, I haven't that honour," said he, smiling. "I *know* Cleve Verney very well, and a very good fellow he is; but we're not connected; my name is Sedly—Thomas Sedly."

"Sedly!" she repeated once or twice, still looking at him, "I don't recollect the name. No—no connexion, I dare say, Cleve; and how *is* Cleve?"

"Very well; he's at Ware, now, for a few days."

"Ah! I dare say, and very well; a pretty boy—very pretty; but not like—no, not the least."

"I've heard people say he's very like what his father was," said Tom.

"Oh! *yes*, I think so; there *is* a likeness," acquiesced she.

"His father's been dead a long time, you know?"

"I know; yes. Cleve is at Oxford

pacing up and down that breezy platform, and discussing with himself the possibility of remaining for another Sunday, on the chance of again seeing the Malory ladies in church.

Lifting up his eyes, in his meditation, he saw a cutter less than a mile away, making swiftly for the pierhead, stooping to the breeze as she flew, and beating up the spray in sparkling clouds from her bows. His practised eye recognised at a glance the "Flake," the victorious yacht of Cleve Verney. With this breeze it was a run without a tack from Ware jetty.

In less than five minutes she furled her sails, and dropped anchor close to the pier stair, and Cleve Verney in another minute stepped upon it from his punt.

"You're to come back in her, to Ware, this evening," said he, as they shook hands. "I'm so glad I've found you. I've to meet a friend at the Verney Arms, but our talk won't take very long; and how have you been amusing yourself all day? Rather slow, isn't it?"

Tom Sedly told his story.

"Well, and what's the *name?*" inquired Cleve.

"I can't tell; they don't know at the hotel; the Etherages don't know. I asked Castle Edwards, and *he* doesn't know either," said Sedly.

"Yes, but that fellow, the servant, who turned you out at Malory——"

"He did not turn me out. I was *going*," interrupted Tom Sedly.

"Well, who *saw* you out? You made him a present; he'd have told you, of course. *Did* he?"

"I didn't ask him."

"Come, that's being very delicate indeed! All I can say is, if I were as spoony as you are, on that girl, I'd have learned all about her long ago. It's nothing to me; but if you find out her name, I know two or three fellows in town who know everything about everybody, and I'll make out the whole story—that is, if she's anybody."

"By Jove! that's very odd. There he *is*, just gone into the Golden Lion, that groom, that servant, that Malory man," exclaimed Tom Sedly very eagerly, and staring hard at the open door of the quaint little pot-house.

"Well, go; give him a pound, it's well worth it," laughed Cleve. "I'm serious, if you want to learn it; no fellow like that can resist a pound; and if *you* tell me the name, I'll make you out all the rest, I really will, when I get to town. There, don't let him get off, and you'll find me at the Verney Arms."

So saying, Cleve, nodding his irresolute friend toward the Golden Lion, walked swiftly away to meet the Reverend Isaac Dixie. But Dixie was not at the Chancery; only a letter, to say that "most unhappily" that morning, Clay Rectory was to undergo an inspection by a Commissioner of Dilapidations; but that, D.V., he would place himself next day, at the appointed hour, at his honoured pupil's disposal.

"Those shovel-hatted martinets! they never allow a minute for common sense, or anything useful—always pottering over their clerical drill and pipe-clay," said Cleve, who, when an idea once entered his mind, pursued it with a terrible concentration, and hated an hour's delay.

So out he came disappointed, and joined Sedly near the Golden Lion.

They said little for a time, but walked on, side by side, and found themselves sauntering along the road toward Malory together.

"Well, Sedly, I forgot,—what about that man? did he tell you anything?"

"I do believe if a fellow once allows a girl to get into his head, ever so little, he's in a sort of way drunk—worse than drunk—systematically foolish," said honest Sedly, philosophizing. "I've been doing nothing but idiotic things ever since church time yesterday."

"Well, but what did he say?"

"He took the pound, and devil a thing he said. He wouldn't tell anything about them. I give you leave to laugh at me. I know I'm the greatest ass on earth, and I think he's the ugliest brute I ever saw, and the most uncivil; and, by Jove, if I stay here much longer, I think he'll get all my money from me. He doesn't ask for it, but I go on giving it to him; I can't help it; the beast!"

"Isn't there a saying about a sage, or something, and his money being soon parted?" asked Cleve. "I think if I were so much gone about a girl as you are, and on such easy terms with that fellow, and tipped him so

was desultory and interrupted. I should not like to risk my credit by relating how often he halted on his way, and how long, to refresh his eyes with the dim outlines of the trees and chimneys of Malory; and how, very late and melancholy, and abstracted, he reached his crib in the Verney Arms.

Early next morning, in pursuance of a clever idea, Tom Sedly made, I admit, his most picturesque and becoming toilet. It consisted of his black velvet knickerbocker suit, with those refined jack-boots of shining leather, and the most charming jerry that had ever appeared in Cardyllian, and away he marched over the hill, while the good people of the town were chumping their muffins and sipping their tea, to the back gate of Malory.

It stood half open, and with as careless a boldness as he could assume, in he went, and walked confidently up the straight farmyard lane, girt with high thorn hedges. Here, bribing a rustic who showed symptoms of churlishness, with half-a-crown, he was admitted into a sort of farmyard, under pretext of examining the old monastic chapel and refectory, now used as a barn, and some other relics of the friary, which tourists were wont to admire.

From the front window of the refectory there is a fine view of the distant mountains. Also, as Tom Sedly recollected, a foreground view, under the trees, in front of the hall-door, and there, with a sudden bound at his heart, he beheld the two ladies who had yesterday occupied the Malory pew, the old and the young, busy about the flower-bed, with garden gauntlets on, and trowel in hand.

They were chatting together cheerily enough, but he could not hear what they said. The young lady now stood up from her work, in a dress which looked to him like plain holland; she had on one of those poked bonnets of the same material, which were very effectual sun-shades, and became some faces so well, when ruralizing young ladies wore them, some years ago.

The young lady had pushed hers a little back, and stood on the grass, at the edge of the flowers, with her trowel glittering in the early sun, in her slender right hand, which rested upon her left; her pretty right foot was advanced a little on the short grass, and showed just its tip, over the edge of the flower-bed. A homely dress and rustic appliances. But, oh! that oval, beautiful face!

Tom Sedly—the "peeping Tom" of this story—from his deep monastic window, between the parting of the tall trees, looked down upon this scene in a breathless rapture. From the palmy days of the Roman Pantheon down, was ever Flora so adored?

From under his Gothic arch, in his monkish shade, Tom could have stood, he fancied, for ever, gazing as friar has seldom gazed upon his pictured saint, on the supernatural portrait which his enthusiasm worshipped.

The young lady, as I have described her, looking down upon her old companion, said something with a little nod, and smiled; then she looked up at the tree tops from where the birds were chirping; so Tom had a fair view of her wonderful face, and though he felt himself in imminent danger of detection, he could not move. Then her eyes with a sidelong glance, dropped on the window where he stood, and passed on instantly.

With the instinct which never deceives us, he felt her glance touch him, and knew that he was detected. The young lady turned quietly, and looked seaward for a few moments. Tom relieved his suspense with a sigh; he hoped he might pass muster for a tourist, and that the privileges of such visiters had not been abridged by the recluses.

The young lady then quietly turned and resumed her work, as if nothing had happened; but, I think, she said something to her elderly companion, for that slim lady, in a tweed shawl, closely broached across her breast, stood up, walked a step or two backward upon the grass, and looked straight up at the window, with the inquisitive frown of a person a little dazzled or near-sighted.

Honest Tom Sedly, who was in a rather morbid state all this morning, felt his heart throb again, and drum against his ribs, as he affected to gaze in a picturesque absorption upon the distant headlands.

The old lady, on the other hand, having distinctly seen in the deep-carved panel of that antique wall, the full-length portrait of our handsome

young friend, Tom Sedly, in his killing knickerbocker suit of black velvet, with his ivory-headed cane in his hand, and that "stunning" jerry which so exactly suited his countenance, and of which he believed no hatter but his own possessed the pattern, or could produce a similar masterpiece.

The old lady with her hand raised to fend off the morning sun that came flickering through the branches on her wrinkled forehead, and her light gray eyes peering on him, had no notion of the awful power of her gaze upon that "impudent young man."

With all his might Tom Sedly gazed at the Welsh headlands, without even winking, while he felt the basilisk eye of the old spinster in gray tweed upon him. So intense was his stare, that old Pandillion at last seemed to nod his mighty head, and finally to submerge himself in the sea. When he ventured a glance downward, he saw Miss Anne Sheckleton with quick steps entering the house, while the young lady had recommenced working at a more distant flower-bed, with the same quiet diligence.

It was to be feared that the old lady was taking steps for his expulsion. He preferred anticipating her measures, and not caring to be caught in the window, left the refectory, and walked down the stone stairs, whistling and tapping the wall with the tip of his cane.

To him, as the old play-books say, entered from the side next the house, and just as he set the sole of his resplendent boot upon the paving-stones, a servant—short, strong, and surly was the man. He did not seem disposed for violence, however, for he touched an imaginary hatbrim as he came up, and informed Mr. Sedly, who was properly surprised and pained to hear it, that he had in fact committed a trespass; that since it had been let, the place was no longer open to the inspection of tourists; and, in short, that he was requested to withdraw.

Tom Sedly was all alacrity and regret. He had never been so polite to a groom in all his life. The man followed him down the back avenue, to see him out, which at another time would have stirred his resentment; and when he held the gate open for him to emerge, Tom gave him no less than three half-crowns—a prodigality whereat his eyes opened, if not his heart, and he made a gruff apology for the necessities imposed by duty, and Tom interrupted him with—

"Quite right, perfectly right; you could do nothing else. I hope the la—— your master is not vexed. You must say I told you to mention how very much pained I was at having made such a mistake. Say that I, Mr. Sedly, regret it very much, and beg to apologise. Pray don't forget. Good morning; and I'm very sorry for having given *you* so much trouble—this long walk."

This tenderness his bow-legged conductor was also in a mood to receive favourably. In fact, if he had not told him his name was Sedly, he might have settled affirmatively the question at that moment before his mind—whether the intruder from whom silver flowed so naturally and refreshingly might not possibly be the Prince of Wales himself, who had passed through the village of Ware, only seven miles away, three weeks before.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT SAIL.

Poor Tom Sedly! The little excitement of parting with the bull-necked keeper of his "garden of beauty," over, his spirits sank. He could not act the unconscious tourist again, and re-commit the premeditated mistake of the morning. His exclusion was complete.

Tom Sedly paid a visit that day at Hazelden, and was depressed, and dull, and absent to such a degree, that Miss Charity Etherage, after he had gone away, canvassed the matter very earnestly, and wondered whether he was quite well, and hoped he had not had bad news from London.

I don't know how Tom got over all that day; but at about four o'clock, having paid his penny at the toll-gate of the pier of Cardyllian, he was

or Cambridge by this time?" she continued.

Tom Sedly shook his head and smiled a little.

"Cleve has done with all that ever so long. He's in the House of Commons now, and likely to be a swell there, making speeches, and all that."

"I know—I know. I had forgot how long it is since; he was a clever boy, wild, and talkative; yes, yes, he'll do for Parliament, I suppose, and be a great man, some day, there. There was no resemblance though; and you, sir, are like him, he was so handsome—no one so handsome."

Tom Sedly smiled. He fancied he was only amused. But I am sure he was also pleased.

"And I don't know. I can make out nothing. No one can. There's a picture. I think they'd burn it, if they knew. It is drawn in chalks by a French artist; they colour so beautifully. It hangs in my room. I pray before it, every morning, for him."

The old lady moaned, with her hands folded together, and still looking steadfastly in his face.

"They'd burn it, I think, if they knew there was a picture. I was always told they were a cruel family. Well, I don't know, I forgive him; I've forgiven him long ago. You are very like the picture, and even more like what I remember him. The picture was taken just when he came of age. He was twenty-seven when I first saw him; he was brilliant, a beautiful creature, and when I looked in his face, I saw the sorrow that has never left me. You are wonderfully like, sir; but there's a difference. You're not so handsome." Here was a blow to honest Tom Sedly, who again thought he was only amused, but was really chagrined.

"There is goodness and kindness in your face; his had little of that, nothing soft in it, but everything brilliant and interesting; and yet you are wonderfully like."

She pressed her hand on her thin bosom.

"The wind grows cold. A pain shoots through me while I look at you, sir. I feel as if I were speaking to a spirit, God help me! I have said more to you to-night, than I have spoken for ten years before; forgive me, sir, and thank you, very much."

She turned from him again, took one long look at the distant headland, and then, with a deep sigh, almost a sob, she hastened towards the door. He followed her.

"Will you permit me to see you to the house?" he pleaded with a benevolence, I fear not quite disinterested. She was by this time at the door, from which with a gesture, declining his offer, she gently waved him back, and disappeared within it, without another word. He heard the key turned in the lock, and remained without, as wise with respect to his particular quest, as he had arrived.

CHAPTER VII.

A VIEW FROM THE REFECTORY WINDOW.

The old discoloured wall of Malory, that runs along the shore overshadowed by grand old timber, that looks to me darker than any other grove, is seven feet high, and as he could see neither through nor over it, and could not think of climbing it; after a few seconds spent in staring at the gray door, Tom Sedly turned about and walked down to the little hillock that stands by the road-side, next the strand, and from the top of this he gazed, during an entire cigar, upon the mullioned windows of Malory, and was gratified by one faint gleam of a passing candle from a gallery window.

"That's a nice old woman, odd as she is; she looks quite like a lady; she's certainly not the woman we saw in church to-day; how well she looked; what a nice figure, that time, as she stood looking from the shore; that cloak thing is loose to be sure; but, by Jove, she might have been a girl almost; and what large eyes she has got, and a well-shaped face. She must have been quite charming, about a hundred years ago; she's not the mother: she's too old; a grand-aunt, perhaps; what a long talk we had, and I such a fool, listening to all that rubbish, and never getting in a word about the people, that peerless creature!"

His walk home to Cardyllian

handsomely, I'd have learned her name, at least, before now."

"I can't; everything goes wrong with me. Why should I risk my reason, and fall in love with the moon? The girl wouldn't look at me; by Jove, she'll never even *see* me; and it's much better so, for nothing can possibly come of it, but pain to me, and fun to every one else. The late train does not stop at our station. I can't go to-night; but, by Jove, I'll be off in the morning. I *will.* Don't you think I'm right, Cleve?"

Tom Sedly stopped short, and faced his friend—who was, in most matters, his oracle—earnestly, laying his hand upon his arm. Cleve laughed at his vehemence, for he knew Tom's impulsive nature, his generous follies, and terrible impetuosity, and, said he —"Right, Tom; always a philosopher! Nothing like the radical cure, in such a case, absence. If the cards won't answer, try the dice, if they won't do, try the balls. I'm afraid this is a bad venture; put your heart to sea in a sieve! No, Tom, that precious freightage is for a more substantial craft. I suppose you have seen your last of the young lady, and it would be a barren fit of friendship to say that I believe you have made any impression. Therefore save yourself, fly, and try what absence will do, and work and play, and eating and drinking, and sleeping abundantly in a distant scene, to dissipate the fumes of your intoxication, steal you away from the enchantress, and restore you to yourself. Therefore I echo—go."

"I'm sure you think it, though you're half joking," said Tom Sedly.

"Well, let us come on. I've half a mind to go up myself and have a peep at the refectory," said Cleve.

"To what purpose?"

"Archæology," said Cleve.

"If you go in there, after what occurred this morning, by Jove, *I'*ll not wait for you," said Sedly.

"Well, come along; there's no harm, I suppose, in passing by. The Queen's highway, I hope, isn't shut up," answered Verney.

Sedly sighed, looked toward Malory, and not being in a mood to resist, walked on toward the enchanted forest and castle, by his companion's side.

When they came by the dark and narrow cross-road that skirts the southern side of Malory to the farmyard gate, nailed on its pier, on a square bit of board, in fresh black and white paint, they read the following words:—

NOTICE.

No admission at this gate to any but servants or others employed at Malory.

Any person found trespassing within the walls will be prosecuted according to law.

— September, 18—.

When the young men, in a momentary silence, read this warning, the ingenuous countenance of Tom Sedly flushed crimson to the very roots of his hair, and Cleve Verney was seized with a fit of laughter that grew more and more violent the more grave and reproachful grew Tom Sedly's aspect.

"Well, Tom, I think, if we have any dignity left, we had better turn our backs upon this inhospitable refectory, and seek comfort elsewhere. By Jove! a pretty row you must have made up there this morning to oblige the Governor to declare the place in a state of siege, and mount his artillery."

"Come away, Cleve; that is, as soon as you've done laughing at that board. Of course, you know as well as I do, that my coming in, and looking as, I hope, any gentleman might, at that stupid old barn, this morning, could not possibly be the cause of that offensive notice. If you think it is pointed at me, of course, it's more amusing, but if not, hang me if I can see the joke."

Tom Sedly was out of spirits, and a little testy, and very silent all the way back to Cardyllian. He refused Cleve's invitation to Ware. He made up his mind to return to London in the morning; and this being his last evening in this part of the world, he must spend it at Hazelden.

So these young gentlemen dined together at the Verney Arms, and it grew dark as they sat by the open window at their wine, and the moon got up and silvered the distant peaks of shadowy mountains, and they grew silent and dreamy as they might in the spell of distant music.

But the people of Hazelden kept early hours, and Tom Sedly suddenly recollected that he must go. They parted, therefore, excellent

friends, for Sedly had no suspicion that Cleve was his rival, and Cleve could afford to be amused at Sedly's rivalry.

When Verney got on board there was a light breeze. "We'll run down toward Penruthyn Priory," said he; and round went the cutter, leaning with the breeze, and hissing and snorting through the gentle swell as she flew on towards the headland on which stands that pretty monastic ruin.

She glided into the black shadow cast by the solemn wall of cloud that now hid the moon from sight, away from the hundred star-like lights of Cardyllian, flying swiftly backward on the left, close under the shapeless blackness of the hill, that rises precipitously from the sea, and over which lies the path from the town to Malory, and onward by the wooded grounds of that old mansion, now an indistinguishable mass of darkness, whose outline was hardly visible against the sky.

I dare say, the thought of crossing the lights of these windows, had its share in prompting this nautical freak, and toward these Cleve's gaze was turned, when, on a sudden, the man looking out at the bows shouted "Starboard;" but before the boat had time to feel the helm, the end of the cutter's boom struck the mast of a small boat; a shout from several voices rose suddenly, and was almost instantaneously far behind. Round went the yacht; they hailed the boat.

"She's lost her mast, I think," said one of Cleve's men.

"D—— you, where are your lights?" shouted a stern, fierce voice.

"No one overboard?" cried Cleve.

"No, no. You'll be the *Wave*, sure? Mr. Cleve Verney, from Ware?" replied a different voice.

"Who are those fellows, do you know?" asked Cleve of his men.

"That will be Christmas Owen, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed Cleve. "And the other's the old gentleman from Malory?"

"Well, I think 'twill be him, sure."

In another minute the punt of the yacht was alongside the boat, with a message from Cleve, inviting the old gentleman on board, and offering to put him ashore wherever he liked best.

Shortly and grimly the courtesy was refused. The wrath of the old man, however, seemed to have subsided, and he gathered himself within the folds of his silence again. All had passed in a darkness deeper than that of Styx. A dense screen of cloud had entirely hid the moon; and though so near, Cleve could not see the old man of Malory, about whom he was curious, with a strange and even tender sort of curiosity, which, certainly, no particular graciousness on his part had invited. In a few minutes more the boat, with the aid of another spar, was on her course again, and the Wave more than a mile away on hers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REVEREND ISAAC DIXIE.

At five o'clock next day, Cleve Verney was again in Cardyllian.

Outside "The Chancery" stood a "fly," only just arrived. He had come only a minute or two before, and was waiting in the chamber which was still called the state room.

The room is long and panelled with oak, and the further end is the fire-place. The ceiling above the cornice slopes at each side with the roof, so as to give it quite a chapel-like effect; a high carved oak mantelpiece, and a carved wainscotting embedding in its panels a symmetrical system of cupboards, closed the perspective, and, as Cleve entered at the door in the further wall, gave effect to the solitary figure of the Reverend Isaac Dixie, who was standing with his back to the fire-place on the threadbare hearth-rug, waiting, with an angelic smile, and beating time to a sacred melody, I am willing to believe, with his broad flat foot.

This clerical gentleman looked some six or seven and forty years old, rather tall than otherwise, broad,

bland, and blue-chinned, smiling, gaitered, and single-breasted.

"Capital place to read out the Ten Commandments," exclaimed Cleve. "Glad to see you, old Dixie. It's a long time since we met."

The clergyman stepped forward, his chin a little advanced, his head a little on one side, smiling rosily with nearly closed eyes, and with a broad hand expanded to receive his former pupil's greeting—

"I've obeyed the summons, you see; punctually, I hope. Delighted, my dear, distinguished young pupil, to meet you, and congratulate you on your brilliant successes, delighted, my dear Cleve," murmured the divine, in a mild rapture of affection.

"That's not so neat as the old speech, Dixie; don't you remember?" said Cleve, nevertheless shaking his great soft red hand kindly enough. "What was it? Yes, you were to be my *tutamen*, and I your *dulce decus*. Wasn't that it?"

"Ha, yes, I may have said it; a little classic turn, you know; ha, ha! not altogether bad—not altogether? We have had many agreeable conversations—colloquies—you and I, Mr. Verney, together, in other and very happy days," said the clergyman, with a tender melancholy smile, while his folded hands faintly smoothed one another over as if in a dream of warm water and wash-balls.

"Do you remember the day I shied that awful ink-bottle at your head? by Jove, it was as large as a tea-pot. If I had hit you that time, Dixie, I don't think we'd ever have found a mitre to fit your head."

"Arch, arch—ha, ha! dear me! yes—I had forgot that—yes, quite—you were always an arch boy, Cleve. Always arch, Mr. Verney."

"Very arch—yes, it was what old Toler called the office bottle; do you remember? it weighed three or four pounds. I think you were glad it was broken; you never got one like it into the room again. I say if it had caught you on the head, what a deal of learning and other things the Church would have lost?"

Whenever it was Cleve's pleasure to banter, the Reverend Isaac Dixie took it in good part. It was his ancient habit, so on this occasion he simpered agreeably—

"It was in the little study at Malory. By-the-by, who are those people you've put into Malory?" continued Cleve.

"Ha—the—the people who occupy the *house?*" asked the clergyman, throwing out a question to gain time.

"Come—who are they?" said Cleve, a little briskly, throwing himself back in his seat at the same time, and looking in Dixie's face—

"Well, *I*'m the person responsible; in fact the lease is to me."

"Yes, I know that; go on."

"Well, I took it at the request of Miss Sheckleton, an elderly lady, whom——"

"Whom I don't care to hear about," interrupted Cleve. "There's an old gentleman—there's a young lady; who are *they?* I want their names."

The Reverend Isaac Dixie was evidently a little puzzled. He coughed, he looked down, he simpered, and shook his head.

"You don't want to tell me, Dixie."

"There is *nothing* I should not be most happy to tell my distinguished pupil. I've been always frank, quite frank with you, Mr. Verney. I've never had a secret."

Cleve laughed gently.

"You wrong me if you think I have," and the Rector of Clay dropped his eyes and coloured a little, and coughed. "But this is not mine—and there really *is* a difficulty."

"Insuperable?"

"Well, really, I'm *afraid* that term expresses it but too truly," acquiesced the clergyman.

"What a bore!" exclaimed Cleve. "Shut the window, if it isn't too much trouble, like a dear old Dixie—a thousand thanks."

"I assure you I would not say it," resumed the Rector of Clay, "if it were not so—and I hope I'm in the habit of speaking truth—and this secret, if so trifling a thing may be seriously so termed, is not mine, and therefore not at my disposal."

"Something in that, old Dixie. Have a weed?" he added, tendering his cigars.

"Thanks, no; never smoke now," said he, closing his eyes, and lifting his hand as if in a benediction.

"Oh, to be sure, your Bishop—I forgot," said Cleve.

"Yes, a-ha; strong opinions; very able lecture—you have no doubt read it."

"With delight and terror. Death riding on a pipe-clay coloured horse. Sir Walter Raleigh, the man of sin, and the smoke of the Bottomless pit, reeking of cheroots. You used not to be such a fool, old Dixie. *I*'m your bishop now; I've said it, mind—and no one sees you," said Cleve, again offering his cigars.

"Well, well; anything, anything; thanks, just for *once*, *only* once;" and he selected one, with a playful bashfulness.

"I'm your bishop—I don't forget. But you must wait till I'm—what d'ye call it?—*consecrated—there*, you need not laugh. Upon my honour, I'm serious; you shall have your choice; I swear you shall," said Cleve Verney, who stood very near the title and estates of Verney, with all their comfortable advowsons appendant.

The Reverend Isaac Dixie smiled affably and meekly with prospective gratitude, and said he softly—

"I'm only too happy to think my distinguished, and I may say, honoured pupil, should deem me fit for a weighty charge in the Church; and I may say, although Clay has been considered a nice little thing, some years ago, yet, since the vicar's—I must say, most unreasonable—claim has been allowed, it is really, I should be ashamed to say how trifling in emolument; we have all our crosses to bear, my dear pupil, friend, and I may say, patron—but it is good, nay, pleasant to me to have suffered disappointments, since in their midst comes no trifling balm in the confidence you are pleased to evidence in my humble fitness."

The clergyman was moved. A gleam of the red western sun through the window, across his broad, meek, and simpering countenance, helped the effect of his blinking eyes, and he hastily applied his handkerchief.

"Isaac, Isaac, you shan't come that over me. I *don't* think you fit—not a bit. I'm not an Aristides, only a bishop; and I don't pretend to more conscience than the rest." His eye rested on him with an unconscious disdain. "And for the life of me, I don't know why I intend doing anything for you, except that I promised, and your name's lucky, I suppose; you used to keep telling me, don't you remember, that all the promises were to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? and you are Isaac, in the middle—*medio tutissimus*—and I think Isaac is the queerest mixture of Jew and boodle in the Old Testament, and—and—so on."

The sentence ended so because Cleve was now lighting his cigar. The clergyman smiled affably, and even waggishly, as one who can bear to be quizzed, and has a confidence in the affection of the joker; and Cleve smoked on serenely and silently for a little.

"And those are really my intentions respecting you," he resumed; "but you are to do as I bid you in the mean time, you know. I say, you mustn't snub your bishop; and, upon my honour, I'm perfectly serious, you shall never see my face again, nor hear of me more, if you don't, this minute, tell me everything you know about those people at Malory."

"Are you really *serious*, Mr. Verney?—*really* so?"

"Yes, quite so; and I can keep my word, as you know. Who are they?"

"You are placing me in the most awkward possible position; pray consider whether you really *do* make a point of it."

"I *do* make a point of it."

"I, of course, keep *nothing* from *you*, when you press it in that way; and beside, although it *is* awkward, it is, in a measure *right*, inasmuch as you are connected with the property, I may say, and have a right to exact information, if you thus so insist upon it as a duty."

"Come, Dixie, who *are* they!" said Cleve, peremptorily.

"Well, he's in some difficulties just now, and it is really vital that his name should not be disclosed, so I entreat you won't mention it; and especially you won't mention me as having divulged it."

"Certainly; of course I don't want to set the beaks on your friend. I shan't mention his name, depend upon it, to mortal. I've just one reason for wishing to know, and I have brought you a journey, here and back, of a hundred and forty miles, precisely to answer me this question, and I *will* know."

"Well, Mr. Verney, my dear sir, I venture to wash my hands of consequences, and unfeignedly relying upon your promise, I tell you that the old gentleman now residing in very strict seclusion at Malory, is Sir Booth——" he paused as if willing that Cleve should supply the surname, and so, perhaps, relieve him of a part of the disclosure.

"Sir Booth *what?*"

"Don't you know?"

"*No.* You can't mean Sir Booth Fanshawe."

"Sir Booth—Sir Booth Fanshawe; yes," said the clergyman, looking down bashfully, "I *do* mean Sir Booth Fanshawe."

"*By Jove!* And don't you think it was rather a liberty, bringing Sir Booth Fanshawe to occupy our house at Malory, after all that has passed?" demanded Cleve Verney, rather sternly.

"Well, *no*, it really did *not*—I'm grieved if I have erred in judgment; but it never *did* strike me in that light—never in that point of view; and Sir Booth doesn't know who it belongs to. It never struck me to tell him, and I don't think he has an idea."

"*I* don't care; but if my *uncle* hears, *he*'ll not like it, I can tell you."

"I should not for any earthly consideration have made myself accessory to anything that could possibly have given a moment's pain to my honoured patron, the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, or to my honoured pupil——"

"Why, yes, my uncle might do you a michief; as for me, I don't care. Only I think it was rather cool, considering how savage he has always been—what a lot of money he has cost us—getting up contests and petitions, and vilifying us wherever he could. He has left no stone unturned—but that's all over; and I think you've committed an indiscretion, because he hasn't a guinea left, and my sensible old grandmother will positively make you pay the rent, and that will be as unpleasant as sharing your tithes with the vicar."

"We are not all so wise as perhaps we should be in our generation," said the Reverend Isaac Dixie, with an apostolic simper that was plaintive and simple. To quiet the reader's uneasiness, however, I may mention that this good man had taken particular care to secure himself against a possible loss of a shilling in the matter. "And there are claims to which it is impossible to be deaf—there is a voice that seems to say, turn not thou away."

"*Do* stop that. You know very well that Booth Mildmay was once a man who could give you a lift; and you did not know, perhaps, that he is ruined."

"Pardon me; but too well. It is to protect him against immediate and melancholy consequences that I ventured, at some little risk, perhaps, to seek for him an asylum in the seclusion of Malory."

"Well, it wasn't all sentiment, my dear Dixie; there's a gold thread of a ravelled tuft running through it somewhere; for whatever the romance of Christianity may say, the practice of the apostles is, very much, nothing for nothing; and if old Mildmay wasn't worth obliging, I dare say Hammerdon wrote or spoke to you. Come, your looks confess it."

"Lord Hammerdon, I have no hesitation in saying, did suggest——"

"There, that will do. Will you come over to Ware, and dine with me? I'm sure old Jones can give you a bed."

The Reverend Isaac Dixie, however, could not come. There was to be a religious meeting in the morning at Clay schoolhouse; the bishop was to be there; and the rector was himself to move a resolution, and had not yet considered what he was to say.

So he stepped with a bland countenance and a deliberate stride into his fly again; and from its window smirked sadly, and waved his hand to the future patron of Fribbledon Cum Fleece, as he drove away; and the clergyman, who was not always quite celestial, and could, on safe occasions, be sharp and savage enough, exploded in a coarse soliloquy over the money, and the day and the ease he had sacrificed to the curiosity of that young man, who certainly *had* some as *odious* points as it had ever been his lot to meet with.

CHAPTER X.

READING AN EPITAPH.

CLEVE VERNEY next afternoon was again on board his yacht. Wind and tide both favouring, the cutter was running under a press of canvas that brought her gunwale to the water's edge once more for Penruthyn Priory. This time it was no mere aquatic whim; it was pursuit.

Searching the wooded sea-board of Malory with his glass, from the terrace of Ware, he had seen an open sail-boat waiting at the jetty. Down came a servant with cloaks and rugs. Cleve grew more and more interested as he adjusted the focus of his glass more exactly. On a sudden, from the little door in the boundary wall, emerged two ladies. There was no mistake; he could swear to them. They were the very same whom he had seen on Sunday in the Malory seat.

He watched till he saw the boat round the point, and then—"Yes," he thought, "they are certainly going to Penruthyn Priory."

And away went Cleve Verney in pursuit of the shadow which he secretly adored. From Ware to Penruthyn Priory is about six miles, and by the time the pursuing cutter was in motion the chace had made more than a mile of her course, and was within two of the landing point at the ruin.

Cleve saw the two ladies disembark. It was now plain that they had come either to visit the ruins, or for a walk in that wild and lonely park called the Warren. Cleve had brought his gun with him, only for an excuse.

Little more than five minutes after the arrival of the open boat, Cleve Verney set his foot upon the rude landing place, as old perhaps as the Priory itself; a clumsy little pier, constructed of great rocks, overgrown with sea-rack, over which slippery platform he strode with reckless haste, and up that steep and pretty little winding lane, the trees overhanging which look centuries old, stooping and mantled in ivy. They may have heard the tinkle of the bells of the prior's mule, as he ambled beneath their boughs, and the solemn swell of the monkish requiem from the melancholy little churchyard close by, under the old Priory windows. The thick stone wall that fences this ancient by-road is clasped together with ivy, and hoar with lichens, irregular, and broken as the battlements of a ruined tower. The approach, and the place itself, are in their picturesque sadness and solitude the very scene and setting of such a romance as Cleve Verney was pursuing.

Into the Warren, by the stile up this road's side, went Cleve, and climbed the gray rocky hillock that commands an extensive view of that wild park; but there they were not.

Well, they must, then, have pursued the path up to the Priory, and thither he followed.

Oh, ho! here they are; the young lady at a little distance looking up at the singular ruin; the old lady engaged in an active discussion with shrewish old Mrs. Hughes, who was very deaf, and often a little tipsy, and who was now testily refusing the ladies admission within the iron gate which affords access to the ruins, of which she held the keys.

No situation could have been more fortunate for Cleve. The Warren and the Priory being his uncle's property, and the termagant Mrs. Hughes his officer, he walked up to the visiter, inquired very courteously the object of the application, and forthwith ordered the portress to open the gate and deliver up her keys; which she did, a good deal frightened at sight of so unexpected a *deus ex machinâ.*

An unmistakable gentleman, handsome, and plainly a sort of prince in this region, the old lady, although she did not know to whom she was obliged, was pleased at his offer to act as Cicerone here, and accepted it graciously.

"My young friend will be very glad; she draws a little, and enjoys such sights immensely. Margaret!" she called. The young lady turned, and Cleve saw before him once more in flesh and blood, that wonderful portrait of Beatrice Conci, which had haunted him for three days.

The young lady heard what her companion had to say, and for a moment her large eyes rested on Cleve

with a glance that seemed to him at once haughty, wild, and shy.

With one hand he held the gate open, and in the other his hat was raised respectfully, as side by side they walked into the open court. They each bowed as they passed, the elder lady very cheerily, the younger with a momentary glance of the same unconscious superiority, which wounded him more than his pride would have allowed; and a puzzled recollection flitted across his mind of having once heard, he could not remember when, that Booth Fanshawe had married a beautiful Italian, an heiress (a princess —wasn't she?)—at all events, a scion of one of their proud old houses, whose pedigrees run back into the Empire, and dwarf into parvenus the great personages of Burke's Peerage. What made it worse was, that there was no shyness, no awkwardness. She talked a good deal to her companion, and laughed slightly once or twice, in a very sweet tone. The old lady was affable and friendly; the young lady, on the contrary, so far from speaking to him, seemed hardly to give herself the trouble of listening to what he said. This kind of exclusion, to which the petted young man certainly was not accustomed, galled him extremely, the more so that she looked, he thought, more beautiful than ever, and that her voice, and pretty slightly foreign accent, added another charm to the spell.

He made them a graceful little lecture on the building, as they stood in the court. If she had any cleverness she would see with what a playful and rapid grace he could convey real information. The young lady looked from building to building as he described them, but with no more interest in the speaker, it seemed to him, than if the bellman of Cardyllian had been reading it from a handbill. He had never done anything so well in the House of Commons, and here it was accepted as a piece of commonplace. The worst of it was that there was no finesse in all this. It was in perfect good faith that this beautiful young lady was treating him like a footman.

Cleve was intensely piqued. Had she been less lovely, his passion might have recoiled into disgust; as it was, with a sort of vindictive adoration, he vowed that he would yet compel her to hang upon his words as angels' music, to think of him, to watch for him, to love him with all that wild and fiery soul which an intuition assured him was hers.

So with this fierce resolve at his heart, he talked very agreeably with the accessible old lady, seeming, in a spirit, I dare say, altogether retaliatory, to overlook the young lady's presence a good deal.

"I've got the key of the church, also; you'll allow me, I hope, to show it to you. It is really very curious—a much older style than the rest of the building—and there are some curious monuments and epitaphs.

The old lady would be charmed, of course, and her young companion, to whom she turned, would like it also. So Cleve, acting as porter, opened the ponderous door, and the party entered this dim and solemn Saxon chapel, and the young lady paused and looked round her, struck, as it seemed, with a sense of something new and very interesting.

"How strange! How rude it is, and irregular; not large, and yet how imposing!" murmured the girl, as she looked round with a momentary awe and delight. It was the first remark she had made, which it was possible for Cleve Verney to answer.

"That's so true! considering how small it is, it does inspire a wonderful awe," said he, catching at the opportunity. "It's very dark, to be sure, and that goes a long way; but its style is so rough and cyclopean, that it overcomes one with a feeling of immense antiquity; and antiquity is always solemn, a gift from people so remote and mysterious, as those who built this chapel, is affecting."

At this point Cleve Verney paused, either his ideas failed him, or he felt that they were leading him into an oration. But he saw that the young lady looked at him, as he spoke with some interest, and he felt more elated than he had done for many a day.

"Is that a broken pillar?" asked Miss Sheckleton,—as I shall for the future call the elder lady.

"That's the font—very ancient—there's some odd carving about it, which has puzzled our antiquaries," said Cleve, leading the way to it.

The young lady had not followed. His exposition was to Miss Sheckleton, whose inquisitiveness protracted

it. It was dry work for Cleve. The young lady had seated herself in a sort of oak stall, and was looking up at the groining of the round ribbed arches, at some distance. The effect was singular. She was placed in the deep chiaro-oscuro, a strong gleam of light entering through a circular aperture in the side wall, illuminated her head and face with a vivid and isolated effect; her rich chestnut hair was now disclosed, her bonnet having fallen back, as she gazed upward, and the beautiful oval face was disclosed in the surrounding shadow with the sudden brilliancy and isolation of a picture in a phantasmagoria.

Verney's eyes were not upon the font on which he was lecturing, his thoughts were wandering too, and Miss Sheckleton observed perhaps some odd vagueness and iteration in his remarks; but the young lady changed her position, and was now examining another part of the church.

Cleve either felt or fancied, seeing, as the Italians say, with the tail of his eye, that she was now, for a moment, looking at him, believing herself unseen. If this were so, was it not the beginning of a triumph? It made him strangely happy.

If Cleve had seen those sights in town, I can't say whether their effect would have been at all similar; but beautiful scenery, like music, predisposes to emotion. Its contemplation is the unconscious abandonment of the mind to sentiment, and once excite tenderness and melancholy, and the transition to love is easy upon small provocations. In the country our visions flit more palpably before us; there is nothing there, as amid the clatter and vulgarities of the town to break our dreams. The beautiful rural stillness is monotony itself, and monotony is the spell and the condition of all mesmeric impressions. Hence young men, in part, run the dangers of those enchanted castles called country houses, in which you lose your heads and hearts, whither you arrive jubilant and free, and whence you are led by delicate hands, with a silken halter round your necks, with a gay gold ring in your obedient noses, and a tiny finger crooked therein, and with a broad parchment pinned upon your patient shoulders, proclaiming to the admiring world that your estates have gone the way of your liberties, and that you and they are settled for life.

"Now, *this*," said he, pointing to a block of carved stone placed in the aisle, "is the monument of old Martha Nokes; pray ask your young lady to come for one moment; it's worth reading."

"*Margaret!*" called the elder visiter, in the subdued tone suited to the sacred place. "Come, darling, and see this."

"This inscription is worth reading, and I can tell you about the old woman, for I remember her quite well. I was eight years old when she died. Old Martha Nokes; she died in her hundred and twentieth year."

The young lady stood by and listened and read. The epitaph related her length of service, her fidelity, and other virtues, and that "this stone was placed here in testimony of the sincere and merited esteem, respect, and affection cherished for the deceased, by Eleanor, Viscountess (Dowager) Verney, of Malory."

"There's some beautiful embroidery on satin, worked by her more than a hundred and fifteen years ago, at Ware," said Cleve Verney. "They say such work can't be had now. '*In the course of her long pilgrimage,*' you see by the epitaph, '*she had no less than twenty-three substantial offers of marriage, all which she declined, prefering her single state to the many cares and trials of wedded life, and willing also to remain to the end of her days in the service of the family of Verney, (to whom she was justly grateful,) and in which she had commenced her active and useful, though humble life, in the reign of King George the First.*' So you see she spent all her life with us; and I'll tell our people, if you should happen to pass near Ware—it's not an hour's sail across—and would care to see it, to show you her embroidery, and her portrait; and if there's anything else you think worth looking at; there are some pictures and bronzes; they'll be quite at your service; my uncle is hardly ever at Ware; and I only run down for a little boating and shooting, now and then."

"Thank you," said the old lady, and utter silence followed. Her young companion glanced at her for a mo-

ment, and saw her look blank and even confounded. She averted her gaze, and something, I suppose, struck her as comical, for, with a sudden little silvery laugh, she said—

"What a charming, funny old woman she must have been!"

And with this excuse she laughed more—and again, after a little interval. Nothing more contagious than this kind of laughter, especially when one has an inkling of the cause. Cleve looked at the font, and lowered his large eyes to the epitaph of the Virgin Martha Nokes, and bit his lips, but he *did* laugh a little in spite of himself, for there was something nearly irresistible in pleasant Miss Sheckleton's look of vacant consternation.

CHAPTER XI.

FAREWELL.

THE young lady was instantly grave, with even a little fiery gleam of anger in her eyes, he thought. He could not help raising his also, now quite gravely and even respectfully, looking on her.

"I think you know who we are," she said a little suddenly and haughtily.

"You are at present living at Malory, I believe," said he, with a respectful evasion.

"Yes; but I mean *who* we are," said Margaret, very pale, very proud, and with her splendid hazel eyes fixed full upon him with the irresistible inspiration of truth.

"I *have* heard—in part accidentally—something."

"Yes," said the girl; "you are Mr. Cleve Verney, and my name is Fanshawe; and my father, Sir Booth Fanshawe, is at present living at Malory."

"My dear! are you *mad?*" gasped Miss Sheckleton aghast.

"Yes. We are the people who live at Malory, and my father had hoped that he might have escaped there the observation of all but the very few persons who take a friendly interest in him. The place was looked out and taken for us by a person of whom we know nothing—a clergyman, I believe. I have now, for the first time, learned from that gravestone to whom the place belongs. We know nothing of the townspeople or of neighbours. We have lived to ourselves; and if he had known that Malory belonged to the Verneys, I hope you believe he would neither have been mad or mean enough to come here, to live in the house of his enemies."

"Oh, Margaret! Margaret! you have ruined your father," said poor Miss Sheckleton, pale as a ghost, and with her trembling fingers in the air.

"I assure you, Miss Fanshawe," said Cleve, "you do me a cruel injustice when you class me with Sir Booth Fanshawe's *enemies*. There have been those miserable money matters, in which *I* never had, nor *could* have had, any influence whatsoever. And there has been political hostility, in which I have been the victim rather than the aggressor. Of course, I've had to fight my battles as best I could; but I've never done anything unfair or unmanly. You plainly think me a personal enemy of Sir Booth's. It pains me that you do so. In the sense in which you seem to think it, I never was, nor in any sense could I continue to be so, in his present—his present—"

The young man hesitated for a word or a paraphrase to convey a painful meaning without offence.

"His present ruin, and his approaching exile," said the young lady.

"I'm sure, sir, what you say is exactly so," pleaded poor Miss Sheckleton, nervously. "It was, as you say, all about elections, and that kind of thing, which, with him, you know, never can be again. So, I'm sure, the feeling is all over. *I*sn't it, Mr. Verney?"

"I don't think it matters much," said the young lady, in the same tone of haughty defiance. "*I* don't—girls, I believe, never *do* understand business and politics. All I know is this—that my father has been ruined. My father has been ruined, and that, I hope, will satisfy his enemies. I know *he* thinks, and *other* people think—people in no way mixed up in his affairs—people who are *impartial*—that it was the cruelty and oppression of Mr.

Kiffyn Verney—your uncle, I think you say—that drove him to ruin. Well, you now know that my father is at Malory."

"He does, darling. We may be overheard," said Miss Sheckleton in an imploring tremor.

But the young lady continued in the same clear tone—

"I can't say what is considered fair and manly, as you say, in political enmity; but, seeing what it has done, I have no reason to believe it very scrupulous or very merciful; therefore, with some diffidence, I ask only, whether you can promise that he shall not be molested for a few days, until some other refuge shall have been provided for us? And when we shall have left England for ever, you will have no more to fear from my father, and can afford, I think, to forget his name."

There was a kind of contradiction here, or rather one of those discords which our sense of harmony requires, and mysteriously delights in—for while her language was toned with something of the anguish of pleading, her mien and look were those of a person dictating terms to the vanquished. Had she but known all, they might have been inspired by the workings of his heart. Her colour had returned more brilliantly, her large eyes gleamed, and her beautiful eyebrow wore that *anguine* curve which is the only approach to a scowl which painters accord to angels. Thus, though her tones were pathetic, she stood like a beautiful image of Victory.

In the silence that followed, Cleve stood before her for a moment confounded. Too many feelings were on a sudden set in motion by this girl's harangue, to find a distinct resultant in words. His pride was stung—something of anger was stirred within him; his finer sympathies, too, were moved, and a deeper feeling still.

"I'm afraid you think me a very mean person, indeed," said Cleve. "To no one, not to my uncle, not to any living person, will I so much as hint that I know anything of Sir Booth Fanshawe's present place of abode. I don't think that we men are ever quite understood by *you*. I hope *that* is it. I *hope* it is not that you entertain a particularly ill opinion of *me*. I haven't deserved it, you'll find I *never* shall. I hope you will employ me. I hope, Miss Sheckleton, *you* will employ me, wherever, in *any* way, you think I can be of use. Your having, although I know it is perfectly accidental, come to Malory, places me under a kind of obligation, I wish you would allow me to think so, of hospitality; there is no room for generosity here; it would be a misplaced phrase; but I wish, *very* much, that you would put my goodwill to the proof, and rely upon my fidelity; only give me a trial."

I believe that every one who is speaking all in earnest, and, for the moment, quite from a good impulse, looks more beautiful in that momentary glow of paradise, and certainly no handsomer young fellow, to my mind, could have been imagined than Cleve Verney, as he stood uncovered before the beautiful stranger, and pleaded for her good opinion.

The young lady was silent, and looked at Miss Sheckleton, as if deputing her to answer, and then looked away.

"You're very kind. I *know* you won't deceive us, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, with an imploring look, and laying her hand unconsciously upon his arm. "I am sure you won't disappoint us; but it is a great difficulty; you've no idea, for Sir Booth feels very strongly, and in fact we don't mention the name of your family to him; and I'm sure—indeed I *know*—if he were aware that Malory was Verney property, he would never have come here, and if I were to tell him, he would leave it at once. It was a very old friend, Lord Hammerdon who employed a clergyman, a Mr. Dixie, I think, a friend of his, to look out a suitable place in a very quiet neighbourhood; and so, without making—without, indeed, the *power* of making inquiry, we came down here, and have just made the discovery—two discoveries, indeed—for not only does the place belong to your family, but you, Mr. Verney, are aware that Sir Booth is here."

"Sir Booth will do me the justice to trust my word. I assure you—I swear to you—no mortal shall learn the secret of his residence from me. I hope Miss Fanshawe believes me. I'm sure *you* do, Miss Sheckleton," said Cleve.

"We are *both very* much obliged," said the old lady.

The girl's eyes were lowered. Cleve thought she made just a perceptible inclination to intimate her acquiescence. It was clear, however, that her fears were satisfied. She raised her eyes, and they rested on him for a moment with a grave and even melancholy gaze, in which—was there confidence? That momentary, almost unconscious glance, was averted, but Cleve felt unaccountably happy and even proud.

"It is then understood," said he, "that I am not to charge myself with having caused, however unintentionally, any disturbance or embarrassment of your plans. Do you think—it would give me so much pleasure—that I might venture to call upon Sir Booth Fanshawe, to make him in person that offer of my humble services, in any way in which he might please to employ me, which I have already tendered to you?"

He saw the young lady turn an alarmed glance upon her companion, and press her hand slightly on her arm, and the old lady said quickly—

"Not for the world! Nothing would vex him more. That is, I mean, it is better he should not think that he has been recognised; he is impetuous, and, as you *must* know, a little fiery, and just now is suffering, and, in fact, I should not venture, although I need not say, I quite appreciate the feeling, and thank you very much."

A silence followed this little speech. The subject that had engrossed and excited the little party, was for the present exhausted, and no one was ready at the moment to start another.

"We have detained you here, most unreasonably, Mr. Verney, I'm afraid," said Miss Sheckleton, glancing towards the door. "The evenings have grown so short, and our boatman said we should be longer returning; and I think we should have been on our way home before now."

"I only wish you would allow me to set you down at Malory, in my boat, but I know that would not do, so you must allow me to see you on board your own."

More time had past, a great deal, during this odd scene, than it takes to read my note of it. When they stept forth from the door of the tenebrous little church, the mellow light of sunset was streaming along the broken pavement and grass, and glowing on the gray walls and ivy of the old building.

Margaret Fanshawe was very silent all the way down to the little stone pier, at which the boat was moored. But the old lady had quite recovered her garrulous good spirits and energy. There was something likeable and even winning in Miss Anne Sheckleton, sixty years though she looked. She did not hide her gray locks; they were parted smoothly over her intelligent forehead, and in her clear, pleasant face you could see at times a little gleam of waggery, and sometimes the tenderness of sentiment. So that there remained with her that inextinguishable youth of spirit that attracts to the last.

Cleve was not one of those fellows who don't understand even so much self-denial as is necessary to commend them to old ladies on occasion. He was wiser. He walked beside her slight figure and light firm step, talking agreeably, with, now and then a stolen glance at the silent girl. Miss Sheckleton was an old woman such as I love. Such as remains young at three score, and is active still with youthful interests, and a vein of benevolent romance.

And now they stood at the gunwale of the boat, and Miss Sheckleton smiling a little anxiously, gave him her hand at parting.

"May I?" said he, in a tone respectful and even melancholy, at the same time, extending his hand with hesitation toward the young lady beside him.

There was a little motion in her hand, as if she would have shut or withdrawn it, but she looked at him with grave eyes; was there doubt in them, or was there confidence? and gave him her hand too, with a sad look. There was one strong violent throb at his heart as he pressed that slender gauge; and then it seemed to stand still for a moment; and he heard the evening breeze among the leaves, like a sigh along the shore. Was it an omen?

The next moment he was standing alone, with his hat in his hand, smiling and waving an adieu over the glittering waves to the receding boat.

THE TENANTS OF MALORY.

BY J. S. LE FANU, AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH CLEVE VERNEY WAYLAYS AN OLD LADY.

CLEVE visited the old Priory next day, but there had been no one to look at it since. He took a walk in the Warren and killed some innocent rabbits, and returned an hour later. Still no one. He loitered about the ruins for some time longer, but nothing came of it. The next day in like manner he again inspected the Priory, to the wonderment of Mrs. Hughes, who kept the keys, and his yacht was seen till sunset hovering about Penruthyn. He drove into the town also now and then, and looked in on the shop-keepers, and was friendly as usual; and on these occasions always took a ramble either over the hill or by the old Malory road, in the direction of the Dower-house.

But the Malory people seemed to have grown still more cautious and reserved since the adventure of Penruthyn Priory. Sunday came, and Miss Anne Sheckleton sat alone in the Malory pew.

Cleve, who had been early in his place, saw the old lady enter alone and the door shut, and experienced a pang of disappointment—more than disappointment, it amounted to pain.

If in the dim light of the Malory seat he had seen, once more, the Guido that haunted him, he could with pleasure have sat out three services; with three of the longest of good Mr. Splayfoot's long sermons. But as it was, it dragged wofully—it made next to no way; the shrilly school-children and the deep-toned Mr. Bray sang more verses than ever to the solemn drone of the organ, and old Splayfoot preached as though he'd preach his last. Even Cleve's watch, which he peeped at with a frequency he grew ashamed of, limped and loitered over the minutes cruelly.

The service would not have seemed so nearly interminable if Cleve had not resolved to waylay and accost the lady at the other side—even at the risk of being snubbed for his pains; and to him, full of this resolve, the interval was miserable.

When the people stood up after the blessing, Cleve Verney had vanished. From the churchyard he had made his exit, by the postern door, from which he and his enamoured friend, Sedly, had descended a week before to the narrow road, under the town wall, leading to Malory.

Down this he walked listlessly till he reached that lonely part of the road which is over-arched by trees; and here, looking over the sloping fields toward the sea, as if at the distant mountains, he did actually waylay Miss Sheckleton.

The old lady seemed a little flurried and shy, and would, he fancied, have gladly been rid of him. But that did not weigh much with Cleve, who, smiling and respectful, walked by her side after he had made his polite salutation. A few sentences having been first spoken about indifferent things, Cleve said—

"I've been to the old Priory twice since I met you there."

"Oh!" said Miss Anne Sheckleton, looking uneasily toward Malory. He thought she was afraid that Sir Booth's eye might chance to be observing them.

Cleve did not care. He rather enjoyed her alarm, and the chance of bringing matters to a crisis. *She* had not considered *him* much in the increased jealousy with which she had cloistered up her beautiful recluse ever since that day which burned in his memory and cast a train of light along the darkness of the interval. Cleve would have been glad that the old man had discovered and attacked him. He thought he could have softened and even made him his friend.

"Do you never purpose visiting the ruin again?" asked Cleve. "I had hoped it interested you and Miss Fanshawe too much to be dropped on so slight an acquaintance."

"I don't know. Our little expedi-

tions have been very few and very uncertain," hesitated Miss Sheckleton.

"Pray, don't treat me *quite* as a stranger," said Cleve in a low and earnest tone; "what I said the other day was not, I assure you, spoken upon a mere impulse. I hope, I am sure, that Miss Fanshawe gives me credit at least for sincerity."

He paused.

"Oh! certainly, Mr. Verney, we do."

"And I so wish you would tell her that I have been ever since thinking how I can be of any real use—ever so little—if only to prove my anxiety to make her trust me even a little."

"I think, Mr. Verney, it is quite enough if we don't *dis*trust you; and I can assure you we do not," said the spinster.

"My uncle, though not the sort of man you may have been led to suppose him—not at all an unkind man—is, I must allow, a little odd and difficult sometimes—you see I'm not speaking to you as a stranger—and he won't do things in a moment; still if I knew exactly what Sir Booth expected from him—if you think I might venture to ask an interview——"

"Quite *impossible!* You must not *think* of it," exclaimed the lady with a look almost of terror, "just now, while all is so fresh, and feelings so excited, he's in no mood to be reasonable, and no good *could* come of it."

"Well, *you* know best, of course. But I expect to be called away, my stay at Ware can't be much longer. My uncle writes as if he wants me; and I wish so much, short as it is, that I could improve it to any useful purpose. I can't tell you how very much I pity Miss Fanshawe, immured in that gloomiest of all gloomy places. Such an unnatural and terrifying seclusion for one so very young."

"It is certainly very triste," said Miss Sheckleton.

"She draws, you told me, and likes the garden, and reads; you must allow me to lend you some books, won't you? *you* I say; and *you* can lend them to her," he added, seeing a hesitation, "and you need take no trouble about returning them. Just lock them up anywhere in the house when you've done with them, and I'll get them when you leave Malory, which I hope won't be for a long time, unless it be for a very much pleasanter residence."

Here came a pause; the eyes of the two pedestrians were directed toward Malory as they descended the road, but no sign of life was visible in that quarter.

"You got home very well that day from the Priory; I watched you all the way," said he at last.

"Oh! yes; the distance is nothing."

Another little pause followed.

"*You're* not afraid, Miss Sheckleton, of venturing outside the walls. I fear, however, I've a great deal to answer for in having alarmed Miss Fanshawe, though quite unintentionally, for the safety of Sir Booth's incognito. The secret is known to *no* one but to *me* and the persons originally entrusted with it; I *swear* to you it's *so*. There's no reason on earth for your immuring yourselves as you do within those melancholy precincts; it excites curiosity, on the contrary, and people begin to pry and ask questions; and I trust you believe that I would not trifle or mislead you upon such a subject."

"You are very good," answered Miss Sheckleton, looking down. "Yes, we *are* obliged to be be very careful; but it is hardly worth breaking a rule; we may possibly be here for so very short a time, you know. And about the books——"

"Oh! about the books I'll hear nothing; there are books coming for me to Ware, and I shan't be there to receive them. And I shall be, I assure you, ever so much obliged if you'll only just give them house-room—they'll be so much safer—at Malory; and you won't deny me the pleasure of thinking that you and Miss Fanshawe will look over them."

He fancied she did not like this; and thought she seemed embarrassed to find an evasion; but before she could speak, he continued, "And how is the little squirrel I saw in the boat the other day; Miss Fanshawe's, I suppose? Such a pretty little thing!"

"Oh! poor little Whisk. There has been a tragedy: some horrid thing, a wild cat or an owl, killed him the other night, and mangled him so; poor little, dear thing, you must not ask."

"Oh dear! I'm *so* sorry; and Miss

Fanshawe can so ill spare a companion just now."

"Yes, it has been a great blow; and—and I think, Mr. Verney, I should prefer bidding you good-bye *here*," said Miss Sheckleton, stopping resolutely, and holding out her fingers for him to take; for she was on odd terms of suspicion and confidence—something more than mere chance acquaintance.

He looked towards the wood of Malory — now overlooking them, almost in the foreground; and, I think, if he had seen Miss Fanshawe under its shadows, nothing would have prevented his going right on—perhaps very rashly—upon the chance of even a word from her. But the groves were empty; neither "Earl King" nor his daughter were waiting for them. So, for simply nothing, it would not do to vex the old lady, with whom, for many reasons, it was desirable that he should continue upon good terms, and with real regret he did *there*, as she desired, take his leave, and slowly walk back to Cardyllian, now and then stealing a glance over the old sidewalk of the steep road, thinking that just possibly his Guido might appear in the shadow to greet the old lady at the gate. But nothing appeared—she went in, and the darkness received her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BOY WITH THE CAGE.

At Ware a letter awaited Cleve, from his uncle, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney. He read it after dinner, with his back to the fire, by a candle, placed on the corner of the chimney-piece. He never was in any great haste to open his uncle's letters, except when he expected a remittance. I must allow they were not entertaining, and did not usually throw much light upon anything. But it was not safe to omit a single line, for his uncle knew them by rote, and in their after meetings asked him questions upon some passages, and referred pointedly to others. Uncle Kiffyn was in fact thin-skinned in his vanities, and was a person with whom it would have been highly inconvenient to have been on any but the very best terms.

Cleve had, therefore, to read these closely written despatches with more attention than even his friend Dixie read his Bible. They were a sore trouble, for their length was at times incredible.

As he read these letters, moans, and even execrations, escaped him, such as poets describe as issuing from the abode of torment—"Good heavens! mightn't he have said that in five words?" Then a "Pish!"—"Always grumbling about that executorship. Why did he take it? I do believe he likes it."

And then Cleve read,—"I see no reason why, with respect to you, I may not exercise—as between ourselves, at least—an absolute unreserve with relation to a fact of which through a channel not necessary to particularize, I have just received an authentic assurance, to the effect, namely, that Sir Booth Fanshawe, whose ruin has been brought about, partly by his virtual insanity in opposing me with an insensate pertinacity and an intense ill feeling, on which I offer no observation, but involving an expense to which his impaired means were obviously inadequate, and partly by early follies, profligacies, and vices, is now living concealed in the Rue de —— , in Paris." Cleve laughed. "He is a person to whom neither courtesy nor forbearance, as it appears to me, can reasonably be held to be in any respect due from me. There has been a recent order, charging him, as you may have seen by the public papers, with £2,317 costs in the collateral suit connected with the trust cause, in which I was, though I by no means sought the position, the plaintiff, to foreclose the mortgage over Wycroft. I have written to apprize Milbanke of the fact, that he may take such steps as the nature of the case may suggest." "Well for Sir Booth he does not know he's so near! What's this? A postscript! well"—"P.S.—I have opened my letter to introduce this postscript, in consequence of a letter which has just

reached me in course of post from Mr. Jos. Larkin, a solicitor, who was introduced to my notice about two years since by a member of the Brandon family, and who is unquestionably a man of some ability in his position in life. His letter is accompanied by a note from Messrs. Nun and Samuels, and the two documents involve considerations so sudden, complicated, and momentous, that I must defer opening them, and request your presence at Verney House on the 15th proximo, when I mean to visit town for the purpose of arriving at a distinct solution of the several reports thus submitted upon a subject intimately connected with my private feelings, and with the most momentous interests of my house."

So abruptly ended the postscript, and for a moment Cleve was seriously alarmed. Could those meddling fellows who had agents everywhere have fished up some bit of Cardyllian gossip about his Malory romance?

He knew very well what the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney would think of that. His uncle could make or mar him. He knew that he had dangerous qualities, being a narrow man, with obstinate resentments. He was stunned for a moment; but then he reflected that all the romance in which he was living had been purely psychologic and internal, and that there was no overt act to support the case which he might not confess and laugh at.

"On the 15th proximo"—Very well; on the 15th he would be in town, and hear his uncle upon this subject, involving his "private feelings" and "the most momentous interests of his house." Could it be that his out-cast uncle, who had been dragging out a villanous existence in Turkey, under the hospitable protection of the Porte—who was said to have killed the captain of a French man-of-war, in that contemplative retreat, and whom he was wont respectfully to call "the Old Man of the Mountains," was dead at last?

The postscript would bear this interpretation and a pompous liking for mystery, which was one of his uncle's small weaknesses, would account for his withholding the precise information, and nursing, and making much of his secret, and delivering it at last, like a Cabinet manifesto or a Sessional address.

"If the Old Man of the Mountains be really out of the way, it's an important event for us!"

And a dark smile lighted the young man's face, as he thought of the long train of splendid consequences that would awake at his death-bed, and begin to march before his funeral.

Ambition, they say, is the giant passion. But giants are placable and sleep at times. The spirit of emulation—the lust of distinction—*hominum volitare per ora—digito monstrarier*—in a wider, and still widening sphere—until all the world knows something about you—and so on and on—the same selfish aspiration, and at best, the same barren progress, till at last it has arrived, you are a thoroughly advertised and conspicuous mediocrity, still wishing, and often tired, in the midst of drudgery and importance and eclat, and then—on a sudden, the *other* thing comes—the first of the days of darkness which are many.

> Thy house shall be of clay,
> A clot under thy head;
> Until the latter day,
> The grave shall be thy bed.

But nature has her flowers and her fruits, as well as those coarse grains and vegetables on which overgrown reputations are stall-fed. The Commons lobby, the division list, the bureau, Hansard, the newspapers, the dreary bombast of the Right Hon. Marcus Tullius Countinghouse, which fashion lauds, and no mortal ever reads; the ironies of Mr. Swelter, so far behind the satire of the *Times*; the jokes, so much below *Punch*, of Mr. Rasp,—enjoy these illusions while you may, now, in the days of thy youth, before your time comes, and care catches you, and you are drawn in and ground under the great old machine which has been thundering round and round, and bruising its proper grist, ever since Adam and Eve walked out of Eden.

But beside all this delicious rape-cake and mangold of politics, Cleve Verney had his transient perceptions of the flowers and fruits, as we say, that spring elsewhere. There are fancy, the regrets, the yearnings—something recluse in the human soul, which will have its day, a day, though brief it may be, of entire domination.

Now it came to pass, among the trees of lonely Malory, at eventide, when the golden air was flooded with the vesper songs of small birds, and the long gray shadows were stretching into distance, that a little brown Welsh boy, with dark lively eyes, and a wire cage in his hand, suddenly stood before Miss Margaret Fanshawe, who awaking from a reverie, with a startled look—for intruders were there unknown—fixed her great eyes upon him.

"You've climbed the wall, little gipsey," said the beautiful lady, with a shake of her head and a little frown, raising her finger threateningly. "What! You say nothing? This is a lonely place don't you know; there are ghosts here and faries, in Malory? And I'm one of them perhaps," she continued, softening a little, for he looked at her with round eyes of wonder and awe.

"And what do you want here? and what have you got in that cage? Let me see it."

Breaking through an accidental cleft among the old trees, one sunset ray streamed on the face of this little Welsh Murillo; and now through the wires of the cage, gilding them pleasantly as he raised it in his hand, and showed two little squirrels hopping merrily within.

"Squirrels! How curious! My poor little Whisk, there's none like you, funny little Whisk, kind little Whisk, true little thing; you loved your mistress, and no one else, no one else. He's buried there, under that large rose-bush; I won't cry for you, little Whisk, any more, I said I wouldn't."

She looked wistfully toward the rose bush, and the little head-stone she had girlishly placed at her favourite's grave, and the little boy saw two great crystal tears glittering in her large eyes as she gazed; and she turned and walked a hasty step or two toward it. I don't know whether they fell or were dried, but when she came back she looked as at first.

"I'll buy one of these little things, they *are* very pretty, and I'll call it Frisk; and I'll please myself by thinking it's little Whisk's brother; it *may* be, you know," she said, unconsciously taking the little boy into the childish confidence. "What would you sell one of those little things for? perhaps you would not like to part with it, but I'll make it very happy, I shall be very kind to it."

She paused, but the little fellow only looked still silently and earnestly in her face.

"Is he deaf or dumb, or a sprite—who are you?" said the girl, looking at him curiously.

A short sentence in Welsh, prettiest of all pretty tongues, with its pleasant accent, was the reply.

"Then all my fine sentences have been thrown away, and not one word has he understood!"

Looking at his impenetrable face, and thus speaking, she smiled; and in that sudden and beautiful radiance he smiled merrily also.

All this happened under the trees close by the old Refectory wall, at the angle of which is a small door admitting into the stable-yard. Opening this she called "Thomas Jones!" and the Cardyllian "helper," so called, answered the invocation quickly.

"Make out from that little boy, what he is willing to take for one of his squirrels," said she, and listened in suspense while the brief dialogue in Welsh proceeded.

"He says, my lady, he does not know, but will go home and ask; and if you give him a shilling for earnest, he'll leave the cage here. So you may look at them for some time, my lady—yes, sure, and see which you would find the best of the two."

"Oh, that's charming!" said she, nodding and smiling her thanks to the urchin, who received the shilling and surrendered the cage, which she set down upon the grass in triumph; and seating herself upon the turf before them, began to talk to the imprisoned squirrels with the irrepressible delight with which any companionable creature is welcomed by the young in the monotony and sadness of solitude.

The sun went down, and the moon rose over Malory, but the little brown boy returned not. Perhaps his home was distant. But the next morning did not bring him back, nor the day, nor the evening; and, in fact, she saw his face no more.

"Poor little deserted squirrels!—two little foundlings!—what am I to think? Tell me, cousin Anne,

was that little boy what he seemed, or an imp that haunts these woods, and wants to entangle me by a bargain uncompleted; or a compassionate spirit that came thus disguised to supply the loss of poor little Whisk; and how and when do you think he will appear again?"

She was lighting her bed-room candle in the faded old drawing-room of Malory, as, being about to part for the night, she thus addressed her gray cousin Anne. That old spinster yawned at her leisure, and then said—

"He'll *never* appear again, dear."

"I should really say, to judge by that speech, that you knew something about him," said Margaret Fanshawe, replacing her candle on the table as she looked curiously in her face.

The old lady smiled mysteriously.

"What is it?" said the girl; "you must tell me—you *shall* tell me. Come, cousin Anne, I don't go to bed to-night till you tell me all you know."

The young lady had a will of her own, and sat down, it might be for the night, in her chair again.

"As to knowing, my dear, I really *know nothing;* but I have my *suspicions.*"

"H-m!" said Margaret, for a moment dropping her eyes to the table, so that only their long silken fringes were visible. Then she raised them once more gravely to her kinswoman's face. "Yes, I *will* know *what* you you suspect."

"Well, I think that handsome young man, Mr. Cleve Verney, is at the bottom of the mystery," said Miss Chatterton, with the same smile.

Again the young lady dropped her eyes gravely, and was for a moment silent. Was she pleased or *dis*pleased? Proud and sad her face looked.

"There's no one here to tell him that I lost my poor little squirrel. It's quite impossible—the most unlikely idea imaginable."

"*I* told him on Sunday," said Miss Sheckleton, smiling.

"He had no business to talk about me."

"Why, dear, unless he was a positive brute, he could not avoid asking for you; so I told him you were *desolé* about your bereavement—your poor little Whisk, and he seemed so sorry and kind; and I'm perfectly certain he got these little animals to supply its place."

"And so has tricked me into taking a present?" said the young lady, a little fiercely—"he would not have taken that liberty——"

"*Liberty*, my dear?"

"Yes, *liberty;* if he did not think that we were fallen, ruined people——"

"Now, my dear child, your father's *not* ruined, I maintain it; there will be more left, I'm very certain, than he supposes; and I could have almost beaten you the other day for using that expression in speaking to Mr. Verney; but you *are* so *impetuous*—and then, could any one have done a more thoughtful or a kinder thing, and in a more perfectly delicate way? He *has*n't made you a present; he has only contrived that a purchase should be thrown in your way, which of all others was exactly what you most wished; he has not appeared, and never *will* appear in it; and I know, for my part, I'm very much obliged to him—*if* he has done it—and I think he admires you too much to run a risk of offending you."

"What?"

"I do—I think he admires you."

The girl stood up again, and took her candle, but paused for a moment by the table looking thoughtfully. Was she paler than usual? or was it only that the light of the candle in her hand was thrown upward on her features? Then she said in a spoken meditation—

"There are dreams that have in them, I think, the germs of insanity; and the sooner we dissipate them, don't you think, the better and the wiser?"

She smiled, nodded, and went away.

Whose dreams did she mean? Cleve Verney's, Miss Sheckleton's, or—could it be, her own?

CHAPTER XIV.

NEWS ABOUT THE HON. ARTHUR VERNEY.

NEXT morning Margaret Fanshawe was unusually silent at breakfast, except to her new friends the squirrels, whose cage she placed on a little table close by, and who had already begun to attach themselves to her. To them she talked, as she gave them their nuts, a great deal of that silvery nonsense which is pleasant to hear as any other pleasant sound in nature. But good old Miss Sheckleton thought her out of spirits.

"She's vexing herself about my conjectures," thought the old lady. "I'm sorry I said a word about it. I believe *I* was a fool, but *she's* a greater one. She's young, however, and has that excuse."

"*How* old are you, Margaret?" said she abruptly, after a long silence.

"Twenty-two, my last birth-day," answered the young lady, and looked, as if expecting a reason for the question.

"Yes; so I thought," said Miss Sheckleton. "The twenty-third of June—a midsummer birth-day—your poor mamma used to say—the glow and flowers of summer—a brilliant augury."

"Brilliantly accomplished," added the girl; "don't you think so, Frisk, and you, little Comet? Are you not tired of Malory already, my friends? *My* cage is bigger, but so am I, don't you see; you'd be happier climbing and hopping among the boughs. What am *I* to you, compared with liberty? I did not *ask* for you, little fools, did I? You came to me; and I will open the door of your cage some day, and give you back to the unknown—to chance—from which you came."

"You're sad to-day, my child," said Miss Sheckleton, laying her hand gently on her shoulder. "Are you vexed at what I said to you last night?"

"What did you say?"

"About these little things—the squirrels."

"No, darling, I don't care. Why should I? They come from Fortune, and that little brown boy. They came no more to *me* than to *you*," said the girl carelessly. "Yes, another nut; you shall, you little wonders!"

"Now, that's just what I was going to say. *I* might just as well have bought them as *you*; and I must confess I coloured my guess a little, for I only mentioned poor Whisk in passing, and I really don't know that he heard me; and I think if he had thought of getting a squirrel for us, he'd have asked leave to send it to *me*. I could not have objected to that, you know; and that little boy may be ill, you know; or something may have happened to delay him, and he'll turn up; and you'll have to make a bargain, and pay a fair price for them yet."

"Yes, of course; I never thought anything else—eventually; and I knew all along you were jesting. I told these little creatures so this morning, over and over again. If they could speak they would say so. Would not you, you two dear little witches?"

So she carried out her pets with her, and hung their cage among the boughs of the tree that stood by the rustic seat to which she used to take her book.

"Well, I've relieved her mind," thought Miss Sheckleton.

But, oddly enough, she found the young lady not sad, but rather cross and fierce all that afternoon—talking more bitterly than ever to her squirrels, about Malory, and with an angry kind of gaiety, of her approaching exile to France.

"It is not always easy to know how to please young ladies," thought Miss Sheckleton. "They won't always take the trouble to know their own minds. Poor thing! It *is* very lonely—very tiresome, to be sure;—and this little temper will blow over."

So, full of these thoughts, Miss Sheckleton repaired to that mysterious study door within which Sir Booth, dangerous as a caged beast, paced his floor, and stormed and ground his teeth, over—not his own vices, prodigalities, and madness, but the fancied villanies of mankind—glared through his window in his paroxysms, and sent his curses like muttered thunder across the sea over the head of old Pendyllion—and then would subside, and write long,

rambling, rubbishy letters to his attorneys in London, which it was Miss Sheckleton's business to enclose and direct, in her feminine hand, to her old friend Miss Ogden, of Bolton-street, Piccadilly, who saw after the due delivery of these missives, and made herself generally useful during the mystery and crisis of the Fanshawe affairs.

Outside the sombre precincts of Malory Margaret Fanshawe would not go. Old Miss Sheckleton had urged her. Perhaps it was a girlish perversity; perhaps she really disliked the idea of again meeting or making an acquaintance. At all events, she was against any more excursions. Thus the days were dull at Malory, and even Miss Sheckleton was weary of her imprisonment.

It is a nice thing to hit the exact point of reserve and difficulty at which an interest of a certain sort is piqued, without danger of being killed. Perhaps it is seldom compassed by art, and a fluke generally does it. I am absolutely certain that there was no design here. But there is a spirit of contrariety—a product of pride, of a sensitiveness almost morbid, of a reserve gliding into duplicity, a duplicity without calculation—which yet operates like design. Cleve was piqued—Cleve was angry. The spirit of the chase was roused, as often as he looked at the dusky woods of Malory.

And now he had walked on three successive days past the old gateway, and on each of them, loitered long on that wind-beaten hill that overlooks the grounds of Malory. But in vain. He was no more accustomed to wait than Louis XIV. No wonder he grew impatient, and meditated the wildest schemes—even that of walking up to the hall-door, and asking to see Sir Booth and Miss Sheckleton, and, if need be, Miss Fanshawe. He only knew that, one way or another, he *must* see her. He was a young man of exorbitant impatience, and a violent will, and would control events.

There are consequences, of course, and these subjugators are controlled in their turn. Time, as mechanical science shows us, is an element in power; and patience is in durability. God waits, and God is might. And without patience we enter not into the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of power, and the kingdom of eternity.

Cleve Verney's romance, next morning was doomed to a prosaic interruption. He was examining a chart of the Cardyllian estuary, which hangs in the library, trying to account for the boat's having touched the bank at low water, at a point where he fancied there was a fathom to spare, when the rustic servant entered with—

"Please, sir, a gentleman which his name is Mr. Larkin, is at the door, and wishes to see you, sir, on partickler business, please."

"Just wait a moment, Edward. Three fathom—two—four feet—by Jove! So it is. We might have been aground for five hours; a shame there isn't a buoy there—got off in a coach, by Jove. *Larkin?* Has he no card?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Oh! yes—very good. Mr. Larkin—The Lodge. Does he look like a gatekeeper?"

"No, sir, please; quite the gentleman."

"What the devil can he want of me? Are you certain he did not ask for my uncle?"

"Yes, sir—the Honorable Mr. Verney—which I told him he wasn't here."

"And why did not you send him away, then?"

"He asked if you were here, and wished to see you partickler, sir."

"Larkin—The Lodge; what is he like—tall or short—old or young?" asked Cleve.

"Tall gentleman, please, sir—not young—helderly, sir, raypher."

"By Jove! Larkin? I think it *is*.—Is he bald—a long face, eh?" asked Cleve with sudden interest.

"Yes, sir, a good deal in that way, sir—raypher."

"Show him in," said Cleve; "I shall hear all about it, now," he soliloquized as the man departed. "Yes, the luckiest thing in the world!"

The tall attorney, with the tall bald forehead and pink eyelids entered simpering, with hollow jaws, and a stride that was meant to be perfectly easy and gentlemanlike. Mr. Larkin had framed his costume upon something he had once seen upon somebody whom he secretly worshipped as

a great authority in quiet elegance. But every article in the attorney's wardrobe looked always new—a sort of lavender was his favourite tint—a lavender waistcoat, lavender trowsers, lavender gloves—so that, as the tall lank figure came in, a sort of blooming and vernal effect, in spite of his open black frock-coat, seemed to enter and freshen the chamber.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Larkin? My uncle is at present in France. Sit down, pray—can I be of any use?" said Cleve, who now recollected his appearance perfectly, and did not like it.

The attorney, smiling engagingly, more and more, and placing a very smooth new hat upon the table, sat himself down, crossing one long leg over the other, throwing himself languidly back, and letting one of his long arms swing over the back of his chair, so that his fingers almost touched the floor, said—

"Oh?" in a prolonged tone of mild surprise. "They quite misinformed me in town—not at Verney House—I did not allow myself time to call there; but my agents, they assured me that your uncle, the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, was at present down here at Ware, and a most exquisite retreat it certainly is. My occupations, and I may say my habits, call me a good deal among the residences of our aristocracy," he continued, with a careless grandeur and a slight wave of his hand, throwing himself a little more back, "and I have seen nothing, I assure you, Mr. Verney, more luxurious and architectural than this patrician house of Ware, with its tasteful colonnade, and pilastered front, and the distant view of the fashionable watering-place of Cardyllian, which also belongs to the family; nothing certainly lends a more dignified charm to the scene, Mr. Verney, than a distant view of family property, where, as in this instance, it is palpably accidental—where it is at all forced, as in the otherwise highly magnificent seat of my friend Sir Thomas Omnibull, baronet; so far from elevating, it pains one, it hurts one's taste"—and Mr. Jos. Larkin shrugged and winced a little, and shook his head—"Do *you* know Sir Thomas?—*no*—I dare say—he's quite a new man, Sir Thomas—we all look on him in that light in our part of the world—a—in fact, a *parvenu*," which word Mr. Larkin pronounced as if it were spelled *pair vennew*. "But, you know, the British Constitution, every man may go up—we can't help it—we can't keep them down. Money is power, Mr. Verney, as the Earl of Coachhouse once said to me—and so it is; and when they make a lot of it, they come up, and we must only receive them, and make the best of them."

"Have you had breakfast, Mr. Larkin?" inquired Cleve, in answer to all this.

"Thanks, yes—at Llewinan—a very sweet spot—one of the sweetest, I should say, in this beauteous country."

"I don't know—I dare say—I think you wished to see me on business, Mr. Larkin?" said Cleve.

"I must say, Mr. Verney, you will permit me, that I really have been taken a little by surprise. I had expected confidently to find your uncle, the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, here, where I had certainly no hope of having the honour of finding you."

I must here interpolate the fact that no person in or out of England was more exactly apprised of the whereabout of the Verneys, uncle and nephew, at the moment when he determined to visit Ware, with the ostensible object of seeing the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke, and the real one of seeing Mr. Cleve, than was my friend Mr. Larkin. He was, however, as we know, a gentleman of ingenious morals and labyrinthine tastes. With truth he was, as it were, on bowing terms, and invariably spoke of her with respect, but that was all. There was no intimacy, she was an utterly impracticable adviser, and Mr. Larkin had grown up under a more convenient tuition.

"The information, however, I feel concerns you, my dear sir, as nearly, in a manner, as it does your uncle; in fact, your youth taken into account, more momentously than it can so old a gentleman. I would, therefore, merely venture to solicit one condition, and that is, that you will be so good as not to mention me to your uncle as having conveyed this information to you, as he might himself have wished to be the first person to open it, and my having done so might

possibly induce in his mind an unpleasant feeling."

"I shan't see my uncle before the fifteenth," said Cleve Verney.

"A long wait, Mr. Verney, for such intelligence as it falls to my lot to communicate, which, in short, I shall be most *happy* to lay before you, provided you will be so good as to say you desire it on the condition I feel it due to all parties to suggest."

"You mean that my uncle need not be told anything about this interview. I don't see that he *need*, if it concerns *me*. What concerns *him*, I suppose you will tell him, Mr. Larkin."

"Quite so; that's quite my meaning; merely to avoid unpleasant feeling. I am most anxious to acquaint you—but you understand the delicacy of my position with your uncle—and that premised, I have now to inform you"—here he dropped his voice, and raised his hand a little, like a good man impressing a sublime religious fact—"that your uncle, the Honorable Arthur Verney, is no more."

The young man flushed up to the very roots of his hair. There was a little pink flush, also, on the attorney's long cheeks; for there was something exciting in even making such an announcement. The consequences were so unspeakably magnificent.

Mr. Larkin saw a vision of permanent, confidential, and lucrative relations with the rich Verney family, such as warmed the cool tide of his blood, and made him feel for the moment at peace with all mankind. Cleve was looking in the attorney's eyes—the attorney in his. There was a silence for while you might count three or four. Mr. Larkin saw that his intended client, Cleve—the future Viscount Verney—was dazzled, and a little confounded. Recollecting himself, he turned his shrewd gaze on the marble face of Plato, who stood on his pedestal near the window, and a smile seraphic and melancholy lighted up the features and the sad pink eyes of the godly attorney. He raised them; he raised his great hand in the lavender glove, and shook his long head devoutly.

"Mysterious are the dealings of Providence, Mr. Verney; happy those who read the lesson, sir. How few of us so favoured! wonderful are His ways!"

With a little effort, and an affectation of serenity, Cleve spoke:—

"No very great wonder, however, considering he was sixty-four in May last." The young man knew his vagabond uncle Arthur's age to an hour, and nobody can blame him much for his attention to those figures. "It might not have happened, of course, for ten or twelve years, but it might have occurred, I suppose, at any moment. How did it happen? Do you know the particulars? But, is there—is there no (he was ashamed to say hope) no chance that he may still be living?—is it quite certain?"

"Perfectly certain, *perfectly*. In a family matter, I have always made it a rule to *be* certain before speaking. No trifling with sacred feelings, that has been my rule, Mr. Verney, and although in this case there are mitigations as respects the survivors, considering the life of privation and solitude, and, as I have reason to know, of ceaseless self-abasement and remorse, which was all that remained to your unhappy relative, the Honorable Arthur Verney, it was hardly to be desired that the event should be very much longer deferred."

Cleve Verney looked for a moment on the table, in the passing contagion of the good attorney's high moral tone.

Cleve just said "*yes*," in a low tone, and shook his head. But rallying, he remarked—

"You, of course, know how the title is affected by this event—and the estates?" And as he raised his eyes he encountered the attorney's fixed upon him with that peculiar rat-like vigilance, concentrated and dangerous, which, as we know, those meek orbs sometimes assumed when his own interests and objects were intensely present to his mind.

Cleve's eye shrank for a second under the enigmatic scrutiny which as instantly gave way, in turn, before *his* glance.

"Oh, certainly," said the attorney, "the public know always something of great houses, and their position; that is, *generally*, of course—details are quite another affair. But every one knows the truly magnificent position, Mr. Verney, in which the event places your uncle, and I may say you. At the same time the House of Lords, *your* house, I may call it now, are,

very properly, particular in the matter of evidence."

"Our consul, I suppose," said Cleve"——

"If he were cognizant of all the points necessary to put in proof, the case would be a very simple one indeed," said Mr. Larkin, with a sad smile, slowly shaking his tall head.

"Where, Mr. Larkin, did my poor uncle die?" inquired Cleve, with a little effort at the word "uncle."

"In Constantinople, sir—a very obscure quarter. His habits, Mr. Verney, were very strange; he lived like a rat—I should say a *rabbit* in a burrow. Darkness, sir, obscurity—known, I believe, personally to but two individuals. Strange fate, Mr. Verney, for one born to so brilliant an inheritance. Known to but two individuals, one of whom died—what a thing life is!—but a few months before him, leaving, I may say, but one reliable witness to depose to his death; and, for certain reasons, that witness is most reluctant to leave Constantinople, and not very easily to be discovered, even there. You see, Mr. Verney, now, probably, something of the difficulty of the case. Fortunately, I have got some valuable information, confidential, I may say, in its nature, and with the aid of a few valuable local agents, providentially at this moment at my disposal, I think the difficulty may be quite overcome."

"If old Arthur Verney is dead, I'll find proof of the fact," said Cleve; "I'll send out people who will know how to come at it."

"You must be well advised, and very cautious, Mr. Verney—in fact, I may tell you, you can't be *too* cautious—for I happen to know that a certain low firm are already tampering with the witness."

"And how the devil can it concern any firm to keep us—my uncle Kiffyn Verney out of his rights?" said Mr. Cleve Verney, scornfully.

"Very true, Mr. Verney, in one sense, *no* motive; but I am older in the sad experience of the world than you, Mr. Verney. At your age I *could* not believe it, much later I *would* not. But, ah! Mr. Verney, in the long-run, the facts are too strong for us. Poor, miserable, fallen human nature, it is capable of *anything*. It is only too true, and too *horrible*. It sticks at *nothing*, my dear Mr. Verney, and their object is to command the witness by this means, and to dictate terms to you—in fact, my dear Mr. Verney, it is shocking to think of it—to *extort money*."

"I hope you over-estimate the difficulty. If the death has occurred I wager my life we'll prove it, and come what will I hope my uncle will never be persuaded to give those scoundrels a shilling."

"Certainly not—not a shilling—not a farthing—but I have taken prompt, and I trust decisive steps to check-mate those gentlemen. I am not at liberty, just at present, to disclose all I know; I don't say that I could exactly undertake the management of the case, but I shall be very happy to volunteer all the assistance in my power; and as I say, some accidental circumstances place me in a position to undertake that you shall not be defeated. A break down, I may mention, would be a more serious matter than you seem to suppose; in fact, I should prefer the Honorable Arthur Verney's living for twelve years more, with clear proof of his death at the end of that time, than matters as they stand at present, with a failure of the necessary proof."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Larkin; my uncle, I am sure, will also be *very* much obliged. I understand, of course, the sort of difficulty you apprehend."

"It's not conjectural, Mr. Verney, I wish it were—but it's past *that*; it *exists*," said the attorney sadly.

"Well, I can only say, we are very much obliged," said Cleve, quite honestly. "I shan't forget your wish, that I should not mention our conversation to my uncle, and if you should learn anything further——"

"*You* shall certainly hear it, Mr. Verney. I must now take my leave. Sweet day, and a beauteous country! How blest you are, Mr. Verney, in you situation! I allude to your scenery, and I may add, the architectural magnificence of this princely residence. What a row of windows as I approached the house! What a number of bed-rooms you must have! Hardly so many, let us hope, as there are mansions, Mr. Verney, in that house to which we humbly trust we are proceeding." Mr. Larkin, who, on his way had called professionally upon

a subscriber to the Gylingden Chapel —an "eminent Christian"—and talked accordingly—perceived that his meat was a little too strong for a babe of Mr. Verney's standing, and concluded more like an attorney of this world.

"Splendid and convenient residence, and in all respects suitable, Mr. Verney, to the fine position of usefulness and, I may say, splendour, to which you are about being called," and he smiled round upon the book-cases and furniture, and waved his hand gently, as if in the act of diffusing a benediction.

"Won't you take something, Mr. Larkin, before you go?" asked Cleve.

"No—thanks—no, Mr. Verney—many thanks. It is but an hour since I had my modest *dejeuner* at that sweet little inn at Lewinan."

So on the door-steps they parted; the attorney smiling quite celestially, and feeling all a-glow with affability, virtue, and a general sense of acceptance. In fact he was pleased with his morning's work for several reasons —pleased with himself, with Cleve Verney, and confident of gliding into the management of the Verney estates, and in great measure of the Verneys themselves; now seeing before him in the great and cloudy vista of his future, a new and gorgeous castle in the air. These chateaux, in the good man's horizon had, of late, been multiplying rapidly, and there was now quite a little city of palaces in his perspective—an airy pageant which, I think, he sometimes mistook for the New Jerusalem, he talked and smiled so celestially when it was in view.

CHAPTER XV.

WITHIN THE SANCTUARY.

"So the old man of the mountains is dead at last," thought Cleve. "Poor old sinner—what a mess he made of it—uncle Arthur! Fine cards, uncle, ill played, sir. I wonder what it all was. To judge by the result he must have been a precious fool. Of what sort was your folly, I wonder—weak brains, or violent will. They say he was clever,—a little bit mad, I dare say; an idea ran away with him, whip and spurs, but no bridle—not unlike me, I sometimes think, headstrong—headlong—but I'll never run in *your* track, though I may break my neck yet. And so this Viscount Verney, *de jure*—out-cast and renegade, *de facto*—has died in one of those squalid lanes of Constantinople, and lies among poor Asiatics, in a Turkish cemetery! This was the meaning of my uncle Kiffyn's letter—never was mortal in such a fuss and flurry about anything, as he is at this moment; and yet he must practise his affectation of indifference, and his airs of superiority —*what* a fool my uncle Kiffyn is!"

Cleve walked back to the study. Things looked changed, somehow. He had never perceived before how old and dingy the furniture was, and how shabby the paint and gilding had grown.

"This house must be made habitable, one of the first things," said he, "and we must take our right place in the county. The Hammerdons have been everything here. It must not be so."

Cleve went to the window and looked out. The timber of Ware is old and magnificent. The view of Malory and Cardyllian and all that Verney sea-board does make an imposing display across the water. The auctioneering slang of the attorney, had under its glare and vulgarity a pleasant foundation of truth, and as the young man viewed this landscape the sun seemed to brighten over it, and he smiled with a new and solemn joy swelling at his heart.

"I hope that attorney fellow, Larkin, will go on and work this thing properly. It would be too bad that any delay should occur for want of proof—another name for want of energy—after the unfortunate old fellow has actually died."

Mr. Larkin's card was upon the table, and with the providence which in all small matters distinguished him, he had written under "The Lodge" his post-town, "Gylingden." So Cleve Verney wrote forthwith to tell him that although he had no authority to direct inquiries in the matter, and that his uncle would, of course, undertake *that*, he was yet so strongly of opinion that *no time*

should be wasted, and that Mr. Larkin's services might be of the greatest possible value, that he could not forbear writing to say so; and also that he would take the first opportunity of pressing that view upon his uncle. So the letter found the good attorney that evening at "The Lodge." He needed no such spur. He was, in fact, very deep in the business already, and, with his own objects in view, was perhaps quite as much excited as either Cleve Verney or his uncle.

When Cleve had despatched this note, the restlessness and fever of this new and great suspense were upon him. It was impossible to sit down and read his magazines and newspapers. Had he been a fisherman he might have taken his rod and fly-book, and becalmed his excited spirit in that mysterious absorption. But he had never possessed patience for the gentle craft. It ought to be cultivated early for its metaphysical virtues—neither transient like music nor poisonous like opium. For a harrassed or excited mind, priceless is the resource of being able to project itself into the condition of the otter or the crane, and think of *nothing* but fish.

Two sedatives, however, were at his disposal—cigars and the sea—and to them he betook himself. Away went the *Wave* over the sparkling sea, with a light breeze, toward the purple dome of Pendillion, streaked with dull yellow rock and towering softly in the distance. Delightful sea-breeze, fragrant cigars, and gently-rising, misty woods of Malory with their romantic interest—and all seen under the glory of this great news from the East. The cutter seemed to dance and writhe along the waves in elation and delight, and the spray flew up like showers of brilliants from the hands of friendly Undines sporting round her bows. Trance-like it seemed, all musical and dreamy; and Cleve felt, for the hour, he could have lived and died in that luxurious fascination.

Away for Pendillion ran the cutter. He did not choose idle tongues in Cardyllian to prate of his hovering about Malory. He knew his yacht would be seen from the pier. Active Captain Shrapnell frequented it, and would forthwith report her course in the billiard and reading rooms, with such conjectures as might strike his ingenious mind. So the cutter should run for that remote headland for nearly an hour, and then with a change of tack for Penruthyn Priory, which was hidden from Cardyllian eyes by intervening promontories; and not one of the wise-acres could tell or guess where he had been.

When the sail of the yacht had grown like a gray speck in the distance, she was put about, and at a sharp angle ran to the rude pier of Penruthyn Priory, whence taking his gun as if for a ramble in the Warren, he told his men to expect him in about two hours, at the turn of the tide.

Across the Warren there is a wild pathway which leads toward Malory, coming out upon the old road close by Llanderris churchyard, and within a few minutes' walk of the wooded grounds of the ancient Dower House of the Verneys.

Approached from this point, there is a peculiar melancholy in the old wood. The quiet little church of Llanderris, and the graveyard with its old yew tree, and the curve of the narrow road overhung by ivy-mantled ash trees form the foreground, as you approach the wildest side of the woodlands, which lie at the foot of the gentle descent.

The little by-road making a sweep skirts the rear of the Malory grounds. Here the great hawthorn hedges have, time out of mind, been neglected, and have grown gigantic and utterly irregular, stooping from the grassy bank like isolated trees, and leaving wide gaps through which you may see the darkened sward, the roots and stems of the forest trees within, and the vistas that break dimly into the distance.

Hours had passed since the *Wave* had left the jetty of Ware, and the autumnal sun was already declining in the early evening. There is no hour and no light, not even night and moonlight—so favourable to a certain pensive and half saddened view of fancy, as that at which the day gives signs of approaching farewell, and gilds the landscape with a funereal splendour.

When Cleve reached the old road that descends by the churchyard, and through its double hedge-rows looked

down upon the enchanted grounds of Malory, he slackened his pace, and fell into a sort of reverie and rapture.

There are few of the impostures we commit more amusing, than that which we habitually practise upon ourselves in assigning the highest moral motives for doing what pleases us best.

"If my uncle Arthur had married some one whom he really loved, how differently all might have gone with him! Here am I, with more money ultimately awaiting me, than I shall really care to spend. One thousand pounds with me will do more than two thousand with most other men. I don't play. I'm not on the turf. Why should I sacrifice my chance of happiness for the sake of a little more money, which I really don't want, or for the sake of party connexion? If I can't make my way without the aid of a wife, I'm not fit for politics, and the sooner I turn to something else the better. Every man ought to consult his affections, and to make his home the centre of them. Where is the good of fortune, and money, and all that, if it does not enable one to do so? How can you love your childen if you don't love their mother—if you hate her, by Jove—as I know fellows that do. Settlements, and political influence—all very fine—and we expect happiness to come of itself, when we have sold our last chance of it."

In this vein was Cleve Verney's contemplation—and even more virtuous and unworldly as he proceeded—in the elation of his new sense of omnipotence and glory. Had he been a little franker with himself he might have condensed it thus, "A fancy has taken possession of me, and I don't choose to deny myself."

Troubling his visions, however, was the image of his uncle, and the distant sound of his cold uncomfortable voice, and a sense of severity, selfishness, and danger, under his feeble smile. Against this teasing phantom with its solemn prattle, however, he closed his eyes and shook his ears. He had never enjoyed a sail or a walk so in all his life. Was nature ever so glorious before, or romance so noble and tender? What a pensive glow and glory was over everything! He walked down the steep little curve of the old road, and found himself on the path that follows the low bank and thorn trees which fence in the woods of Malory.

Walking slowly, and now and then pausing, he looked among the trunks and down the opening aisles of the wood. But there was no sign of life. The weeds nodded in the shadow, and now and then a brown leaf fell. It was like the wood of the "Sleeping Beauty." The dusky sunlight touched it drowsily, and all the air was silent and slumbrous.

The path makes a turn round a thick clump of trees, and as he passed this, on a sudden he saw the beautiful young lady standing near the bank, her hat thrown on the ground, the thick folds of her chestnut hair all golden in the misty sunlight. Never so like the Guido before. The large eyes, the delicate, oval, and pearly tints, and the small vermillion mouth, its full lips parted, he could see the sunlight glitter on the edge of the little teeth within.

A thrill—a kind of shiver—passed through him, as if at sight of a beautiful spectre. She saw him stop, and in the momentary silence, he thought—was it fancy?—he saw a blush just tinge her cheeks. On the bank, glimmering in the sunlight, was the cage with the little squirrels hopping inside.

"What a sweet evening!" said he. "I've been down to Penruthyn Priory—I've grown so fond of that old place. I used not to care about it; but—but one changes—and now it seems to me the most interesting place in the world, except, perhaps, one. *You* tired of it very quickly, Miss Fanshawe. You have not half seen it, you know. Why don't you come and see it again?"

"I suppose we ought to," said the young lady, "and I dare say we shall."

"Then do to-morrow, pray," said he.

She laughed, and said,

"An excursion like that must always depend on the whim of the moment, don't you think, to be the least pleasant? It loses its charm the moment it loses the air of perfect liberty and caprice; and I don't know whether we shall ever see the old Priory again."

"I'm very sorry," said Cleve. There was honest disappointment in his tone, and his dark soft eyes looked full in hers.

She laughed again a little, and looking at the pretty old Church of Llanderris, that stands among nodding ash-trees on the near upland, she said,

"That old church is, I think, quite beautiful. I was exploring these woods with my little squirrels here, when I suddenly came upon this view, and here I have stood for nearly ten minutes."

"I'm very much obliged, I know, to Llanderris Church, and I'm glad you admire it, for I like it very much myself," said Cleve. "And so you have got two squirrels. I was so sorry to hear last Sunday that you had lost your little pet, Whisk. Wasn't that his name?"

"Yes. Poor little Whisk!"

"And you're not going to leave Malory?"

"Not immediately, I believe," said Miss Fanshawe.

"That makes me very happy for *three* reasons. First, it proves that you have some confidence, after all, in me; and next, because it shows that you are not so troubled here as you feared you might be; and the third reason—perhaps you shall never know until, at least, you can guess it."

"Yes; papa is not talking of leaving immediately, and I'm glad of it, for I know it was important that he should be able for a little time longer to remain in England. And now, I think my little squirrels want their nuts, and I must go."

"Poor little prisoners! You're all prisoners here. You shut yourselves up so jealously," said Cleve. "The monastic spirit still haunts this place, I think. It must be that old convent ground. Almost every day I walk by this old place, and never have seen you once, even through the grille, until to-day."

She stooped to pick up the cage.

"I'm sure you'll shake hands before you go, Miss Fanshawe, won't you, through the grille—the hedge, I mean?"

"Well, I wish you good-bye," she said merrily, but without coming nearer.

"And we are good friends?"

"Oh, yes."

"And—and I'll tell you a secret, but you must forgive me." As he spoke, Cleve Verney, with a step or two, mounted the bank and stood beside the young lady within the precincts of Malory.

"Don't mind coming in, pray," said she.

"Only for a moment—only one word," besought Cleve.

"Well," laughed Miss Fanshawe, though he thought a little uneasily, for she glanced toward the house, and he fancied was thinking of Sir Booth. "If you *will*, I can't help it, only you must remember there are dogs in the yard, and," she added, more gravely, "Papa has so many notices up to keep people away, I think he'd be vexed."

"Here I'm almost on neutral ground. It is only a step, and I'm gone. I want to tell you—you must forgive me—but it was I who ventured to send that little boy with those squirrels there. I knew how lonely you were, and I was selfish enough to wish to give you even so small an evidence of the sincerity of my professions—my anxiety to be employed."

"That little boy promised to return, but has never come back," said Miss Fanshawe, throwing back her head a little, and pushing back her rich tresses. He thought there was a brighter colour in her cheeks, and that she looked a little haughty. She was certainly very grave.

"He could not help it, poor little fellow. He lives at Pendillion, nine miles across the water, and nearly thirty by the road. You must lay the whole blame upon me—you must, indeed. It's all my fault."

Miss Fanshawe was looking haughtily down upon the unconscious squirrels. There was something of disdain in this glance that fell from under her long silken lashes askance upon them, hopping and frisking within their wires, as if she meditated sending them away in disgrace.

"You must not be vexed with *them* either, it is all my doing, my fault, let me confess. I ran down in my boat to Pendillion, and looked up that little fellow who always has half-a-dozen squirrels. I had to go twice to find him, and then brought

him here, and he met a lady in the wood. There was no mistaking the description, and so these little creatures are your happy captives—and—and I hope you are not very angry with me."

The colour was brilliant in her cheeks, and gave a corresponding brilliancy to her great eyes; how were they so mysterious and yet so frank. She looked on him gravely in silence for a moment, and then down upon the little prisoners in the cage. Was she angry—was she embarrassed—was she secretly pleased? That odd, beautiful girl—he could not quite understand her.

But Mr. Cleve Verney was an impetuous orator; when he took fire upon a theme he ran on daringly—

"And I've done more—I'm even *more* guilty; I'll hide nothing—I've taken a great reward—I've got a talisman that I prize above anything—this little coin;" and there was a bright shilling fixed like a "charm" to his watch-guard. "It is *mine*—you only can guess; no one shall ever know why I wore it next my heart, and you may blame, but you won't *quite* condemn me; and won't you make it up with those poor little squirrels, and tell me it's all forgiven, and—by Jove, here's Miss Sheckleton."

And so she was approaching with her firm light step, and pleasant smile, in the shadow of the great trees, and near enough already to greet Mr. Verney with—

"How d'ye do? What a charming evening!" and having arrived at the hawthorn tree beside which they were standing, she added, in the low tone in which she habitually spoke of the Baronet—"Sir Booth is not very well this evening—he's in his room, and he'll stay at home reading the newspapers, at all events for an hour or so."

There was a want of tact in this little intimation which had an effect quite different from that which the good-natured spinster intended; for Miss Fanshawe said, lifting the little cage, and looking in upon its tiny inhabitants in the sun-light—

"Then I had better run in and see him." And with a gay slight "Good-bye," she nodded to Mr. Cleve Verney. The smile was only a momentary light, and the great hazel eyes looked thoughtfully as she turned away; and as she disappeared among the old trees, it seemed to him that a dull shadow suddenly descended upon the trees, and the grass, and the landscape.

"We are always, Mr. Verney, in a fuss here; that is, we never know exactly what a post may bring us any morning or evening, or how suddenly we may have to go. You may guess what it is to *me*, who have to arrange everything," said the old lady, lifting her thin fingers and shaking her head. "As for Margaret there, she's both clever and energetic—but *no* experience; and therefore, I don't allow her to take her share. Poor thing, it is a sad thing for her, and this place so very solitary."

"You must make her come to-morrow," said Cleve, "and see the Priory; you only *half* saw it the other day, and I assure you it *is* really well worth looking at; and it will make an excuse to tempt her outside this gloomy place. I can't conceive anything worse than being shut up week after week in this solitude and darkness; you really *must* persuade her; at what hour do you think you will be there?"

"Well now, I really *will* try," said good-natured Miss Sheckleton, "positively I will; and I think about three o'clock—I'll make an effort; and I'll send for the boat without asking her, and she can hardly refuse me, then. You have not been here very long, Mr. Verney?" she added, with a not unnatural curiosity.

"Only a minute or two before you came," he answered, a little inaccurately, I think.

"Well, then, to-morrow, I hope to tempt her out a little, as you advise; and—and"—she glanced over her shoulder toward the house—"perhaps I had better bid you good-bye for the present, Mr. Verney; good-bye! How beautiful everything looks!"

She gave him her hand very cordially. Was there a sort of freemasonry and a romantic sympathy in that kindly farewell? Cleve felt that she at least half understood him. Even in reserved natures, there is an instinctive yearning for a confidant in such situations, and a friendly recognition, even at a distance, of one that promises to fill that place of sympathy.

So there they parted, with friendly

This will necessarily form one of the topics for discussion at the proposed conference of the 15th prox.; and it is no small point in our favour satisfactorily to be assured, that a witness to the cardinal points to which I have referred, is actually produceable, and at this moment in communication with me.

"I have the honour, to be, dear sir, very truly yours,—Jos. Larkin.

"The Lodge, Gylingden."

"P.S. I may mention that the Jewish firm to which I have referred, have addressed to me a letter, apprizing me of the decease of the Hon. Arthur Verney, a step which, as terminating the annuities on which they received an annual per-centage, they would not, I presume, have adopted, had they not been absolutely certain of the event, and confident also that we must, if they were silent, be otherwise apprized of it."

I think our old friend, Jos. Larkin, wrote this letter with several views, one of which was that, in the event of his thinking proper, some years hence, notwithstanding his little flourishes of gratuitous service, to unmuzzle the ox who had trod out the corn, and to send in his little bill, it might help to show that he had been duly instructed to act in this matter at least by Mr. Cleve Verney. The other object, that of becoming the channel of negotiating terms with Mr. Dingwell, offered obvious advantages to a gentleman of acquisitive diplomacy and ingenious morals.

Cleve, however, had not yet learned to suspect this Christian attorney, and the letter on the whole was highly satisfactory.

"Capital man of business, this Mr. Larkin! Who could have expected an answer, and so full an answer, so immediately to his letter? That is the kind of attorney the world sighed for. Eager, prompt, clear, making his clients' interests his own"—more literally sometimes than Cleve was yet aware—"disinterested, spirited, for was he not risking his time, skill, and even money, without having been retained in this matter, and with even a warning that he might possibly never be so? Did he not also come in the livery of religion, and discuss business, as it were, in a white robe and with a palm in his hand? And was it not more unlikely that a man who committed himself every hour to the highest principles should practise the lowest, than a person who shirked the subject of virtue, and thought religion incongruous with his doings? Perhaps, Cleve thought, there *is* a little too much of that solemn flam. But who can object if it helps to keep him straight?

This was a day of surprises. Cleve had gone up to his room to replenish his cigar-case, when a chaise drove up to the hall-door of Ware, and looking out he beheld with a sense of dismay his uncle's man, Mr. Ridley, descending from his seat on the box, and opening the door of the vehicle from which the thin stiff figure of the Hon. Kyffin Fulke Verney descended, and entered the house.

Could the devil have hit upon a more ill-natured plan for defeating the delightful hopes of that day? Why could not that teasing old man stay where he was? Heaven only knows for how many days he might linger at Ware, lecturing Cleve upon themes on which his opinion was not worth a pin, directing him to write foolish letters, and now and then asking him to *obleege* him by copying papers of which he required duplicates, benumbing him by his chilly presence, and teasing him by his exactions.

Cleve groaned when he saw this spectacle from his window, and muttered something, I don't care what.

"Let him send for me if he wants me. I shan't pretend to have seen him," was Cleve's petulant resolve. But a knock at his room door, with an invitation from his uncle to visit him in the library, settled the question.

"How d'ye do, Cleve," and his uncle, who was sitting in a great chair at the table, with some letters, noted, and folded into long slim parallelograms, already before him, put forth a thin hand for him to shake, throwing back his head, and fixing his somewhat dull grey eyes with an imperious sort of curiosity upon him, he said, "Yes—yes—recruiting. I was always in favour of making the most of the recess, about it. You make the most of it. I saw Winkledon and your friend Colonel Tellerton at Dyce's yesterday, and talked with 'em, about it, and they both agreed with me, we are pretty sure of a stormy session,

looks, in a friendly spirit. Romantic and simple Miss Sheckleton, he felt that you were a true denizen of those regions in which of late, he had been soaring, unworldly, true. It is well for a time to put off the profound attorney-nature of man—we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out—and to abandon ourselves for a few happy moments, to the poetry and kindness which are eternal.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR VISITOR.

In romances, it is usual for lovers to dream a great deal, and always of the objects of their adorations. We acquiesce gravely and kindly in these conventional visions; but, on reflection, we must admit that lovers have no faculty of dreaming, and of selecting the subjects of their dreams superior to that of ordinary persons. Cleve, I allow, sat up rather late that night, thinking, I venture to say, a great deal about the beautiful young lady who, whether for good or ill, now haunted his thoughts incessantly; and with this brilliant phantom, he walked romantically in the moonlight, by the chiming shingle of the sea. But I don't know what his dreams were about, or that he had any dreams at all; and in fact, I believe he slept very soundly, but awoke in the morning with a vague anticipation of something very delightful and interesting. Why is it that when we first awake the pleasures or the horrors of the coming day seem always most intense?

Another bright autumnal day with just breeze enough to fill the sails of the cutter. On his breakfast-table from the post-office of Ware, lay a letter, posted over night, at Gylingden, by his newly revealed good angel, "very truly, his," Jos. Larkin. It said—

"My dear Sir,

"The interview with which you this morning honoured me, conveyed more fully even than your note implies, your wishes on the subject of it. Believe me, I needed no fresh incentive to exertion in a matter so pregnant with serious results, and shall be only too happy to expend thought, time, and money, in securing *with promptitude* a succesful termination of what in dilatory or inexperienced hands might possibly prove a most tedious and distressing case. I have before me directions of proofs on which I have partially acted, and mean in the sequel, to do so completely. I may mention that there awaited me on my arrival, a letter from my agent, to whom I more particularly referred in the conversation, which you were pleased to invite this morning, conveying information of very high importance, of which I shall be happy to apprize you in detail, when next I have the honour of a conference. I am not quite clear as to whether I mentioned this morning a person named Dingwell?—

"No, you did not," interpolated Cleve"—

"Who," continued the letter, "resides under circumstances of considerable delicacy on his part, at Constantinople, and who has hitherto acted as the correspondent and agent of the Jewish firm, through whom the Dowager Lady Verney and your uncle, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, were accustomed, with a punctuality so honourable to their feelings, to forward the respective annuities, which they were so truly considerate, as mutually to allow for the maintenance of the unfortunate deceased. This gentleman, Mr. Dingwell, has been unhappily twice a bankrupt in London, in early life, and there are still heavy judgments against him; and as he is the only witness discoverable, competent from his habits of regular communication with your lamented uncle for years, to depose to his identity and his death; it is unfortunate that there should exist, for the special reasons I have mentioned, considerable risk and difficulty in his undertaking to visit London, for the purpose of making the necessary depositions; and I fear he cannot be induced to take that step without some considerable pecuniary sacrifice on your part.

late sittings, and no end of divisions, and I am glad you are taking your holiday so sensibly. The *Wave's* here, isn't she? and you sail in her a good deal, I dare say, about it, and you've got yourself a good deal sunburnt. Yes, the sun does that; and you're looking very well, about it, I think, very well indeed."

To save the reader trouble, I mention here, that the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney has a habit of introducing the words "about it," as everybody is aware who has the honour of knowing him, without relation to their meaning, but simply to caulk, as it were, the seams of his sentences, to stop them where they open, and save his speech from foundering for want of this trifling half-pennyworth of oakum.

"Very lonely, sir, Ware is. You've come to stay for a little time perhaps."

"Oh! no. Oh, dear no. My view upon that subject is very decided indeed, as you know. I ask myself this question,—What good can I possibly do, about it, by residing for any time at Ware, until my income shall have been secured, and my proper position ascertained and recognized? I find myself, by the anomalous absurdity of our existing law, placed in a position, about it, of so much difficulty and hardship, that although the people must feel it very much, and the county regret it, I feel it only due to myself, to wash my hands, about it, of the entire thing for the present, and to accept the position of a mere private gentleman, which the existing law, in its wisdom, imposes upon me—don't you see?"

"It certainly is," acquiesced Cleve, "a gross absurdity that there should be no provision for such a state of things."

"Absurdity! my dear sir, I don't call it *absurdity* at all, I call it rank injustice, and a positive *cruelty*," said the feeble voice of this old gentleman with an eager quaver in it, while, as always occurred when he was suddenly called on for what he called his "sentiments" upon this intolerable topic, a pink flush suffused his thin temples and narrow forehead. Here I am, about it, invested by opinion, don't you see, and a moral constraint, with the liabilities of a certain position, and yet excluded from its privileges and opportunities. And what, I ask myself, can come of such a thing, except the sort of thing, about it, which we see going on? Don't you see?"

"Any news of any kind from the East, sir?" asked Cleve.

"Well, now, wait—a—a—I'll come to it—I'm coming to that. I wrote to you to say that you were to meet me in town, d'ye see, on the fifteenth, and I mean to have a Mr. Larkin, an attorney, a very proper person in his rank of life—a very proper person—about it, to meet us and produce his papers, and make his statement again. And I may tell you that he's of opinion, and under the impression, that poor Arthur is *dead*, about it; and now you'll read this letter—very good, and now this—very good, and now this."

As he handed these papers over to Cleve in succession, the young gentleman thought his uncle's air a little grander than usual, and fancied there was a faint simper of triumph discernible under the imposing solemnity of his looks.

"A—well, that's all at present; and immediately on receiving the first of these I wrote to the Consul there—a very proper man, very well connected; I was, I may say, instrumental in getting his appointment for him—saying he'd obleege me by instituting inquiry and communicating the result, and possibly I may hear before the fifteenth; and I should be very glad, about it, to learn or know something definite, in which case, you see, there would be a natural solution of the complication, and prove Arthur's death, about it, would clear up the whole thing, as in fact it does in all such cases, don't you see?"

"Of course, sir, perfectly."

"And as to mourning and all that, about it, I don't quite see my way, no, I don't; because, d'ye see, I rather think there should be nothing of the kind: but it's time enough to decide what the house of Verney are to do when I shall have all the circumstances, don't you see, and everything.

Cleve acquiesced.

"And if the dissolution comes next autumn—as they apprehend it may—you'll have no annoyance from the old quarter—Sir Booth Fanshawe—he's quite ruined—about it; and he's been obliged to leave the country; he's in France, I understand, and I've

directed our people in town to follow up the proceedings as sharply as possible. He has never spared me, egad, and has often distressed me very seriously by his malevolent and utterly wanton opposition where he had absolutely no chance whatever, and knew it, nor any object, I give you my honour, except to waste my money, when, owing to the absurd and cruel position I was placed in, he knew very well I could not have a great deal to throw away. I look upon a person of that kind as a mere nuisance; and I look upon it as a matter of dooty and of principle, about it, which one owes to society, don't you see, to exterminate them like vermin. And if you want to stop it, you musn't let him off when you've got the advantage at last, do you see? You must follow it up, and show evil-disposed people that if they choose to play that game they may, but that you won't let 'em off, about it, and that."

These were not very pleasant words in Cleve's ears.

"And, egad, sir, I'll make an example of that person—I owe it to the principle of fair political warfare, about it. What business had he to run me into six thousand pounds expense for nothing, when he had not really a hundred pounds at the time he could call his own? And I ask myself, where's the good of laws if there's no way of reaching a person who commits, from the worst possible motives, an outrage like that, and goes on doing that sort of thing, about it?"

Here the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney paused for a minute, and then looked at his watch.

"Just ten minutes still left me. I'll ask you to touch the bell, Cleve. I'm going to the railway—to Lluinan, about it, and to see the people at Heathcote Hall; and I've been thinking you ought to turn over in your mind what I said last Easter, when we were at Dawling Hill. If this affair of poor Arthur's should turn out to be quite genuine, I think the connexion would recommend itself to most people," he said grandly, "and in fact you might strengthen yourself very materially, about it. You could not do better than marry Ethel; depend upon it, the connexion will serve you. Her uncle, you know—always some of that family—in the Cabinet; and Dorminster, they say—every one says it—Winkledon, for instance, and Colonel Tellers, about it—they both said the other day he'll very probably be Minister. Every one says that sort of thing, about it; and it has been my opinion a long time before people generally began to say so, and things of that sort, don't you see?"

As a general rule Cleve knew that there was no use in fighting any favourite point with his uncle. He acquiesced and relied upon dilatory opportunities and passive resistance; so now he expressed himself most gratefully for the interest he had always taken in him, and seemed to lend an attentive ear, while the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney rambled on upon this theme in his wise and quietly dictatorial way. It was one of his pleasantest occupations, and secretly pleased his self-love, this management of Cleve Verney—really a promising young man—and whom he magnified, as he did everything else that belonged to him, and whose successes in the house, and growth in general estimation, he quietly took to himself as the direct consequence of his own hints and manipulations, and his "keeping the young man straight about it."

"He has an idea—the young man has—that I know something about it—that I have seen some public life, and known people—and things of that sort. He is a young man who can take a hint, and, egad, I think I've kept him pretty straight about it up to this, and put him on a right track, and things; and if I'm spared, I'll put him on, sir. I know pretty well about things, and you see the people talk to me, and they listen to me, about it, and I make him understand what he's about, and things."

And then came the parting. He gave Cleve ten pounds, which Mrs. Jones, the draper's wife, used to distribute for him among certain poor people of Cardyllian. So his small soul was not destitute of kindliness, after it's fashion; and he drove away from Ware, and Cleve stood upon the steps, smiling and waving his hand, and repeating, "On the fifteenth," and then, suddenly was grave.

THE TENANTS OF MALORY.

BY J. S. LE FANU, AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEY VISIT THE CHAPEL OF PENRUTHYN AGAIN.

VERY grave was Cleve Verney as the vehicle disappeared. His uncle's conversation had been very dismal. "Ethel, indeed! What an old bore he is, to be sure! Well, no matter; we shall see who'll win the game. He is so obstinate and selfish." There was, indeed, an enemy in front—an up-hill battle before him. He prayed heaven, at all events, that the vindictive old gentleman might not discover the refuge of Sir Booth Fanshawe. Were he to do so, what a situation for Cleve! He would talk the matter over with his uncle's attorneys, who knew him, with whom he had often been deputed to confer on other things; who, knowing that he stood near the throne, would listen to him, and they would not be over zealous in hunting the old Baronet down. With those shrewd suspicious fellows, Cleve would put it all on election grounds. Sir Booth was in a kind of way popular. There would be a strong feeling against any extreme or vindictive courses being taken by his uncle, and this would endanger, or at all events embarrass Cleve very seriously.

Away shadows of the future—smoke and vapours of the pit! Let us have the sun and air of heaven while we may. What a charming day! how light and pleasant the breeze! The sails rattle, quiver and fill, and stooping to the breeze, away goes the *Wave*—and, with a great sigh, away go Cleve's troubles, for the present; and his eye travels along the sea-board, from Cardyllian on to Malory, and so to the dimmer outline of Penruthyn Priory.

As usual, they ran for Pendillion—the wind favouring—and at two o'clock Cleve stood on the sea-rocked stones of the rude pier of Penruthyn, and ordered his men to bring the yacht, seaward, round the point of Cardrwydd, and there to await him. There was some generalship in this. His interview of the morning had whetted his instincts of caution. Round Cardrwydd the men could not see, and beside he wanted no one—especially not that young lady, whom the sight might move to he knew not what capricious resolve, to see the *Wave* in the waters of Penruthyn.

Away went the yacht, and Cleve strolled up to the ancient Priory, from the little hillock beyond which is a view of the sea half way to Malory.

Three o'clock came, and no sail in sight.

"They're not coming. I shan't see her. They must have seen our sail. Hang it, I knew we tacked too soon. And she's such an odd girl, I think, if she fancied I were here she'd rather stay at home, or go anywhere else. Three o'clock! He held his watch to his ear for a moment. "By Jove! I thought it had stopped. That hour seems so long. I won't give it up yet, though. That"—he was going to call him *brute*, but even under the irritation of the hypothesis he could not—"that oddity, Sir Booth, may have upset their plans or delayed them."

So, with another long look over the lonely sea toward Malory, he descended from his post of observation, and sauntered, rather despondingly, by the old Priory, and down the steep and pretty old road, that sinuously leads to the shore and the ruinous little quay, for which boats of tourists still make. He listened and lingered on the way. His mind misgave him. He would have deferred the moment when his last hope was to go out, and the chance of the meeting, which had been his last thought at night, and his first in the morning, should lose itself in the coming shades of night. Yes, he would allow them a little time—it could not be much—and if a sail were not in sight by the time he reached the strand he would give all

up, and set out upon his dejected walk to Cardrwydd.

He halted and lingered for a while in that embowered part of the little bye-road which opens on the shore, half afraid to terminate a suspense in which was still a hope. With an effort, then, he walked on, over the little ridge of sand and stones, and, lo! there was the boat with furled sails by the broken pier, and within scarce fifty steps the Malory ladies were approaching.

He raised his hat—he advanced quickly—not knowing quite how he felt, and hardly recollecting the minute after it was spoken, what he had said. He only saw that the young lady seemed surprised and grave. He thought she was even vexed.

"I'm so glad we've met you here, Mr. Verney," said artful Miss Sheckleton. "I was just thinking, compared with our last visit, how little profit we should derive from our present. I'm such a dunce in ancient art and architecture, and in all the subjects, in fact, that help one to understand such a building as this, that I despaired of enjoying our excursion at all as I did our last; but, perhaps you are leaving, and once more is too much to impose such a task as you undertook on our former visit."

"Going away! You could not really think such a thing possible, while I had a chance of your permitting me to do the honours of our poor Priory."

He glanced at Miss Fanshawe, who was at the other side of the chatty old lady, as they walked up the dim monastic road; but the Guido was looking over the low wall into the Warren, and his glance passed by unheeded.

"I'm so fond of this old place," said Cleve, to fill in a pause. "I should be ashamed to say—you'd think me a fool almost—how often I take a run over here in my boat, and wander about its grounds and walls, quite alone. If there's a transmigration of souls, I dare say mine once inhabited a friar of Penruthyn—I feel, especially since I last came to Ware, such an affection for the old place."

"It's a very nice taste, Mr. Verney. You have no reason to be ashamed of it," said the old lady decisively. "Young men, now-a-days, are so given up to horses and field games, and so little addicted to anything refined, that I'm quite glad when I discover any nice taste or accomplishment among them. You must have read a great deal, Mr. Verney, to be able to tell us all the curious things you did about this old place and others."

"Perhaps I'm only making a great effort—a show of learning on an extraordinary occasion. You must see how my stock lasts to-day. You are looking into that old park, Miss Fanshawe," said Cleve, slily crossing to her side. "We call it the Warren; but it was once the Priory Park. There is a very curious old grant from the Prior of Penruthyn, which my uncle has at Ware, of a right to pasture a certain number of cows in the park, on condition of aiding the Verderour in keeping up the green underwood. There is a good deal of holly still there, and some relics of the old timber, but not much. There is not shelter for deer now. But you never saw anything like the quantity of rabbits; and there are really, here and there, some very picturesque fragments of old forest—capital studies of huge oak trees in the last stage of venerable decay and decrepitude, and very well worthy of a place in your sketch-book."

"I dare say; I should only fear my book is hardly worthy of them," said Miss Fanshawe.

"I forgot to show you this when you were here before." He stopped short, brushing aside the weeds with his walking-cane. "Here are the bases of the piers of the old park gate."

The little party stopped, and looked as people do on such old-world relics. But there was more than the conventional interest; or rather something quite different; something at once sullen and pensive in the beautiful face of the girl. She stood a little apart, looking down on that old masonry. "What is she thinking of?" he speculated; "is she sad, or is she offended? is it pride, or melancholy, or anger? or is it only the poetry of these dreamy old places that inspires her reverie? I don't think she has listened to one word I said about it. She seemed as much a stranger as the first day I met her here;" and his

heart swelled with a bitter yearning, as he glanced at her without seeming to do so. And just then, with the same sad face, she stooped and plucked two pretty wild flowers that grew by the stones, under the old wall. It seemed to him like the action of a person walking in a dream —half unconscious of what she was doing, quite unconscious of every one near her.

"What shall we do?" said Cleve, so soon as they had reached the enclosure of the buildings. "Shall we begin at the refectory and library, or return to the chapel, which we had not quite looked over when you were obliged to go, on your last visit?"

This question his eyes directed to Miss Fanshawe; but as she did not so receive it, Miss Shekleton took on herself to answer for the party. So into the chapel they went—into shadow and seclusion. Once more among the short rude columns, the epitaphs, and round arches, in dim light, and he shut the heavy door with a clap that boomed through its lonely aisles, and rejoiced in his soul at having secured if it were only ten minutes' quiet and seclusion again with the ladies of Malory. It seemed like a dream.

"I quite forgot, Miss Fanshawe," said he, artfully compelling her attention, "to show you a really curious, and even mysterious tablet, which is very old, and about which are ever so many stories and conjectures."

He conveyed them to a recess between two windows, where in the shade is a very odd mural tablet.

"It is elaborately carved, and is dated, you see, 1411. If you look near you will see that the original epitaph has been chipped off near the middle, and the word '*Eheu*,' which is Latin for 'alas!' cut deeply into the stone."

"What a hideous skull!" exclaimed the young lady, looking at the strange carving of that emblem, which projected at the summit of the tablet.

"Yes, what a diabolical expression! Isn't it?" said Cleve.

"Are not those *tears?*" continued Miss Fanshawe, curiously.

"No, look more nearly and you will see. They are worms—great worms—crawling from the eyes, and knotting themselves, as you see," answered Cleve.

"Yes," said the lady, with a slight shudder, "and what a wicked grin the artist has given to the mouth. It is wonderfully powerful! what rage and misery! It is an awful image! Is that a tongue?

"A tongue of fire. It represents a flame issuing from between the teeth; and on the scroll beneath, which looks, you see, like parchment shrivelled by fire, are the words in Latin, "Where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched;" and here is the epitaph—'Hic sunt ruinæ, forma letifera, cor mortuum, lingua dæmonis, digitus proditor, nunc gehennæ favilla, Plorate. Plaudite.' It is Latin, and the meaning is, 'Here are ruins, fatal beauty, a dead heart, the slimy tongue of the demon, a traitor finger, now ashes of gehenna, Lament. Applaud. Some people say it is the tomb of the wicked Lady Mandeville, from whom we have the honour of being descended, who with her traitor finger indicated the place where her husband was concealed; and afterwards was herself put to death, they say, though I never knew any evidence of it, by her own son. All this happened in the Castle of Cardyllian, which accounts for her being buried in the comparative seclusion of the Priory, and yet so near Cardyllian. But antiquarians say the real date of that lady's misdoings was nearly a century later; and so the matter rests an enigma, probably to the day of doom."

"It is a very good horror. What a pity we shall never know those sentences that have been cut away," said Miss Fanshawe.

"That skull is worth sketching; won't you try it?" said Cleve.

"No, not for the world. I shall find it only too hard to forget it, and I don't mean to look at it again. Some countenances seize one with a tenacity and vividness quite terrible."

"Very true," said Cleve, turning away with her. "We are not rich in wonders here, but the old church chest is worth seeing, it is curiously carved."

He led them towards a niche in which it is placed near the communion rails. But said Miss Sheckleton—

"I'm a little tired, Margaret; you will look at it, dear; and Mr. Verney will excuse me. We have been

delving and hoeing all the morning, and I shall rest here for a few minutes." And she sat down on the bench.

Miss Margaret Fanshawe looked at her a little vexed, Cleve thought; and the young lady said—

"Hadn't you better come? It's only a step, and Mr. Verney says it is really curious."

"I'm a positive old woman," said cousin Anne, "as you know, and really a little tired; and you take such an interest in old carving in wood—a thing I don't at all understand, Mr. Verney; she has a book quite full of really beautiful drawings, some taken at Brussels, and some at Antwerp. Go, dear, and see it, and I shall be rested by the time you come back."

So spoke good-natured Miss Sheckleton, depriving Margaret of every evasion; and she accordingly followed Cleve Verney as serenely as she might have followed the verger.

"Here it is," said Cleve, pausing before the recess in which this antique kist is placed. He glanced towards Miss Sheckleton. She was a good way off—out of hearing, if people spoke low; and besides, busy making a pencilled note in a little book which she had brought to light. Thoughtful old soul!

"And about the way in which faces rivet the imagination and haunt the memory, I've never experienced it but once," said Cleve, in a very low tone.

"Oh! It has happened to me often, very often. From pictures, I think, always; evil expressions of countenance that are ambiguous and hard to explain, always something demoniacal, I think," said the young lady.

"There is nothing of the demon—never was, never could be—in the phantom that haunts me," said Cleve. "It is, on the contrary—I don't say angelic. Angels are very good, but not interesting. It is like an image called up by an enchanter—a wild, wonderful spirit of beauty and mystery. In darkness or light I always see it. You like to escape from yours. I would not lose mine for worlds; it is my good genius, my inspiration; and whenever that image melts into air, and I see it no more, the last good principle of my life will have perished."

The young lady laughed in a silvery little cadence that had a sadness in it, and said—

"Your superstitions are much prettier than mine. My good cousin Anne, there, talks of blue devils, and my familiars are, I think, of that vulgar troop; while yours are all *couleur de rose*, and so elegantly got up, and so perfectly presentable and well bred, that I really think I should grow quite tired of the best of them in a five minutes' *tête-à-tête*."

"I must have described my apparition very badly," said Cleve. "That which is lovely beyond all mortal parallel can be described only by its effects upon your fancy and emotions, and in proportion as these are intense, I believe they are incommunicable."

"You are growing quite too metaphysical for me," said Miss Margaret Fanshawe. "I respect metaphysics, but I never could understand them."

"It is quite true," laughed Cleve. "I *was* so. I hate metaphysics myself; and they have nothing to do with this, they are so dry and detestable. But, now, as a physician—as an exorcist—tell me, I entreat, in my sad case, haunted by a beautiful phantom of despair, which I have mistaken for my good angel, how am I to redeem myself from this fatal spell."

A brilliant colour tinged the young lady's cheeks, and her great eyes glanced on him for a moment, he thought, with a haughty and even angry brilliancy.

"I don't profess the arts you mention; but I doubt the reality of your spectre. I think it is an *illusion*, depending on an undue excitement in the organ of self-esteem, quite to be dispelled by restoring the healthy action of those other organs—of common sense. Seriously, I'm not competent to advise gentlemen, young or old, in their difficulties, real or fancied; but I certainly would say to any one who had set before him an object of ambition, the attainment of which he thought would be injurious to him, —be manly, have done with it, let it go, give it to the winds. Besides, you know that half the objects which young men place before them, the ambitions which they cherish, are the merest castles in the air, and that all

but themselves can see the ridicule of their aspirations."

"You must not go, Miss Fanshawe; you have not seen the carving you came here to look at. Here is the old church chest; but—but suppose the *patient*—let us call him—knows that the object of his—his *ambition* is on all accounts the best and noblest he could possibly have set before him. What then?"

"What then!" echoed Miss Fanshawe. "How can any one possibly tell—but the patient, as you call him, himself—what he should do. Your patient does not interest me; he wearies me. Let us look at this carving."

"Do you think he should despair because there is no present answer to his prayers, and his idol vouchsafes no sign or omen?" persisted Cleve.

"I don't think," she replied with a cold impatience, "the kind of person you describe is capable of despairing in such a case. I think he would place too high a value upon his merits to question the certainty of their success—don't you?" said the young lady.

"Well, no; I *don't* think so. He is not an unreal person; I know him, and I know that his good opinion of himself is humbled, and that he adores with an entire abandonment of self the being whom he literally worships."

"Very adoring, perhaps, but rather——that's a great dog like a wolfhound in that panel, and it has got its fangs in that pretty stag's throat," said Miss Fanshawe, breaking into a a criticism upon the carving.

"Yes—but you were saying 'Very adoring, but rather'—what?" urged Cleve.

"Rather silly, don't you think? What business have people adoring others of whom they know nothing—who may not even like *them*—who may possibly *dis*like them extremely? I am tired of your good genius—I hope I'm not very rude—and of your friend's folly—tired as *you* must be; and I think we should both give him very much the same advice. *I* should say to him, pray don't sacrifice yourself; you are much too precious; consider your own value, and above all remember that even should you make up your mind to the humiliation of the altar and the knife, the ceremonial may prove a fruitless mortification, and the opportunity of accomplishing your sacrifice be denied you by your divinity. And I think that's a rather well-rounded period: don't you?"

By this time Miss Margaret Fanshawe had reached her cousin, who stood up smiling.

"I'm ashamed to say I have been actually amusing myself here with my accounts. We have seen, I think, nearly everything now in this building. I should so like to visit the ruins at the other side of the courtyard."

"I shall be only too happy to be your guide, if you permit me," said Cleve.

And accordingly they left the church, and Cleve shut the door with a strange feeling both of irritation and anxiety.

"Does she dislike me? Or is she engaged? What can her odd speeches mean, if not one or other of these things? She warns me off, and seems positively angry at my approach. She took care that I should quite understand her ironies, and there was no mistaking the reality of her unaccountable resentment."

So it was with a weight at his heart, the like of which he had never experienced before, that Cleve undertook, and I fear in a rather spiritless way performed his duty as Cicerone, over the other parts of the building.

Her manner seemed to him changed, chilled, and haughty. Had there come a secret and sudden antipathy, the consequence of a too hasty revelation of feelings which he ought in prudence to have kept to himself for some time longer? And again came with a dreadful pang the thought that her heart was already won—the heart so cold and impenetrable to him—the passionate and docile worshipper of another man—some beast—some fool. But the first love—the only love worth having; and yet, of all loves the most ignorant—the insanest.

Bitter as gall was the outrage to his pride. He would have liked to appear quite indifferent, but he could not. He knew the girl would penetrate his finesse. She practised none herself; he could see and feel a change that galled him—very slight but intolerable. Would it not be a further humiliation to be less frank than she,

and to practise an affectation which she despised.

Miss Sheckleton eyed the young people stealthily and curiously now and then, he thought. She suspected perhaps more than there really was, and she was particularly kind and grave at parting, and, he thought, observed him with a sort of romantic compassion which is so pretty in old ladies.

He did touch Miss Fanshawe's hand at parting, and she smiled a cold and transient smile as she gathered her cloaks about her, and looked over the sea, toward the setting sun. In that clear, mellow glory, how wonderfully beautiful she looked! He was angry with himself for the sort of adoration which glowed at his heart. What would he not have given to be indifferent, and to make her feel that he was so!

He smiled and waved his farewell to Miss Sheckleton. Miss Fanshawe was now looking toward Malory. The boat was gliding swiftly into distance, and disappeared with the sunset glittering on its sides, round the little headland, and Cleve was left alone.

His eyes dropped to the shingle, and broken shells, and seaweed, that shone beneath his feet, in that level stream of amber light. He thought of going away, thought what a fool he had been, thought of futurity and fate, with a sigh, and renounced the girl, washed out the portrait before which he had worshipped for so long, with the hand of defiance—the water of Lethe. Vain, vain; in sympathetic dyes, the shadow stained upon the brain, still fills his retina, glides before him in light and shadow, and will not be divorced.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLEVE AGAIN BEFORE HIS IDOL.

Cleve could not rest—he could not return to Ware. He would hear his fate defined by her who had grown so inexpressibly dear by being unattainable! Intolerant of impediment or delay, this impetuous spirit would end all, and know all, that very night.

The night had come—one that might have come in June. The moon was up—the air so sweetly soft—the blue of heaven so deep and liquid.

His yacht lay on the deep quiet shadow, under the pier of Cardyllian. He walked over the moon-lighted green, which was now quite deserted. The early town had already had its tea and "pikelets." Alone—if lovers ever *are* alone—he walked along the shore, and heard the gentle sea ripple rush and sigh along the stones. He ascended the steep path that mounts the sea-beaten heights, overlooking Cardyllian on one side, and Malory on the other.

Before him lay the landscape on which he had gazed as the sun went down that evening, when the reflected light from the gold and crimson sky fell softly round. And now, how changed everything! The moon's broad disk over the headland was silvering the objects dimly. The ivied castle at his left looked black against the sky. The ruins how empty now! How beautiful everything, and he how prodigious a fool! No matter. We have time enough to be wise. Away, to-morrow, or, at latest, next day; and in due course would arrive the season—that tiresome House of Commons—and the routine of pleasure, grown on a sudden so insupportably dull.

So he had his walk in the moonlight toward Malory—the softest moonlight that ever fell from heaven—the air so still and sweet: it seemed an enchanted land. Down the hill toward Malory he sauntered, looking sometimes moonward, sometimes on the dark woods, and feeling as five weeks since he could not have believed himself capable of feeling, and so he arrived at the very gate of Malory.

Here stood two ladies, talking low their desultory comments on the beautiful scene, as they looked across the water toward the headland of Pendillion. And these two ladies were the same from whom he had parted so few hours since. It was still very early everywhere except at Cardyllian, and these precincts of Malory, so entirely deserted at these hours that there seemed as little chance of inter-

ruption at the gate, as if they had stood in the drawing-room windows.

Cleve was under too intense and impetuous an excitement to hesitate. He approached the iron gate where, as at a convent grille, the old and the young recluse stood. The moonlight was of that intense and brilliant kind which defines objects clearly as daylight. The ladies looked both surprised; even Miss Anne Sheckleton looked grave.

"How very fortunate!" said Cleve, raising his hat, and drawing near. Just then he did not care whether Sir Booth should chance to see him there or not, and it was not the turn of his mind to think, in the first place, of consequences to other people.

Happily, perhaps, for the quiet of Malory, one of Sir Booth's caprices had dispensed that night with his boat, and he was at that moment stretched in his long silk dressing-gown and slippers, on the sofa, in what he called his study. After the first instinctive alarm, therefore, Miss Anne Sheckleton had quite recovered her accustomed serenity and cheer of mind, and even interrupted him before he had well got to the end of his salutation to exclaim—

"Did you ever, anywhere, see such moonlight? It almost dazzles me."

"Quite splendid; and Malory looks so picturesque in this light." He was leaning on the pretty old gate, at which stood both ladies, sufficiently far apart to enable him, in a low tone, to say to the younger, without being overheard—"So interesting in every light, now! I wonder your men don't suspect me of being a poacher, or something else very bad, I find myself prowling about here so often, at this hour, and even later."

"I admire that great headland—Pendillion, isn't it?—so very much; by this light one might fancy it white with snow," said Miss Sheckleton.

"I wish you could see Cardrwydd Island *now;* the gray cliffs in this light are so white and transparent, you can hardly imagine so strange and beautiful an effect," said Cleve.

"I dare say," said Miss Sheckleton.

"You have only to walk about twenty steps across that little road towards the sea, and you have it full in view. Do let me persuade you," said Cleve.

"Well, I don't mind, said Miss Sheckleton. "Come, Margaret, dear," and these latter words she repeated in private exhortation, and then aloud she added—"We have grown so much into the habit of shutting ourselves up in our convent grounds, that we feel like a pair of runaway nuns whenever we pass the walls; however, I *must* see the island."

The twenty steps toward the sea came to be a hundred or more, and at last brought them close under the rude rocks that form the little pier; in that place, the party stopped, and saw the island, rising in the distant sheen, white and filmy; a phantom island, with now and then a gleam of silvery spray, from the swell which was unfelt within the estuary, shooting suddenly across its points of shadow.

"Oh! how beautiful!" exclaimed Miss Fanshawe, and Cleve felt strangely elated in her applause. They were all silent, and Miss Sheckleton, still gazing on the distant cliffs, walked on a little, and a little more, and paused.

"How beautiful!" echoed Cleve, in tones as low, but very different. "Yes, how beautiful—how fatally beautiful; how beloved, and yet how cold. Cold, mysterious, wild as the sea; beautiful, adored and *cruel*. How *could* you speak as you did to-day? What have I done, or said, or thought, if you could read my thoughts? I tell you, ever since I saw you in Cardyllian church I've thought only of you; you haunt my steps; you inspire my hopes; I adore you, Margaret."

She was looking on him with parted lips, and something like fear in her large eyes, and how beautiful her features were in the brilliant moonlight.

"Yes, I *adore* you; I don't know what fate or fiend rules these things; but to-day it seemed to me that you hated me, and yet I adore you; *do* you hate me?"

"How wildly you talk; you can't love me; you don't know me," said this odd girl.

"I don't know you, and yet I love you; you don't know *me*, and yet I think you *hate* me. You talk of love as if it were a creation of reason and calculation. You don't know it, or

you could not speak so; antipathies perhaps you do experience; is there no caprice in *them?* I love you *in defiance* of calculation, and of reason, and of hope itself. I can no more help loving you than the light and air without which I should die. You're not going; you're not *so* cruel; it may be the last time you shall ever hear me speak. You won't believe me; no, not a word I say, although it's all as true as that this light shines from heaven. You'd believe one of your boatmen relating any nonsense he pleases about people and places here. You'll believe worse fellows, I dare say, speaking of higher and dearer things, *perhaps*—I can't tell; but *me*, on *this*, upon which I tell you, *all* depends for me, you won't believe. I never loved any mortal before. I did not know what it was, and now here I stand, telling you my bitter story, telling it to the sea, and the rocks, and the air, with as good a chance of a hearing. I read it in your manner and your words to-day. I felt it intuitively; you don't care for me; you can't like me; I see it in your looks. And now, will you tell me—for God's sake, Margaret, do tell me—is there not some one—some one you *do* like? I know there is."

"That's *quite* untrue—I mean there is *nothing* of the kind," said this young lady, looking very pale, with great flashing eyes, "and one word more of this kind to-night you are not to say to me. Cousin Anne," she called, "come, I'm going back."

"We are so much obliged to you, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, returning; "we should never have thought of coming down here, to look for this charming view; come, Margaret, darling, your papa may want me."

An inquisitive glance she darted furtively at the young people, and I dare say she thought that she saw something unusual in their countenances.

As *they* did not speak, Miss Sheckleton chatted on unheeded, till, on a sudden, Cleve interposed with—

"There's an old person—an old lady, I may call her—named Rebecca Mervyn, who lives in the steward's house, adjoining Malory, for whom I have a very old friendship; she was so kind to me, poor thing, when I was a boy. My grandmother has a very high opinion of her; and *she* was never very easily pleased. I suppose you have seen Mrs. Mervyn; you'd not easily forget her, if you have. They tell me in the town that she is quite well; the same odd creature she always was, and living still in the steward's house."

"I know—to be sure—I've seen her very often—that is, half-a-dozen times or more—and she *is* a very odd old woman, like that benevolent enchantress in the 'Magic Ring'—don't you remember? who lived in the castle with white lilies growing all round the battlements," answered Miss Sheckleton.

"I know," said Cleve, who had never read it.

"And if you want to see her, *here* she is, oddly enough," whispered Miss Sheckleton, as the old woman with whom Sedley had conferred on the sea-beach came round the corner of the boundary wall near the gateway by which they were now standing, in her grey cloak, with dejected steps, and looking, after her wont, sea-ward toward Pendillion.

"No," said Cleve, getting up a smile as he drew a little back into the shadow; "I'll not speak to her now; I should have so many questions to answer, I should not get away from her for an hour."

Almost as he spoke the old woman passed them, and entered the gate; as she did so, looking hard on the little party, and hesitating for a moment, as if she would have stopped outright. But she went on without any further sign.

"I breathe again," said Cleve; "I was so afraid she would know me again, and insist on a talk."

"Well, perhaps it is better she did not; it might not do, you know, if she mentioned your name, for *reasons*," whispered Miss Sheckleton, who was on a sudden much more intimate with Cleve, much more friendly, much more kind, and somehow pitying.

So he bade good-night. Miss Sheckleton gave him a little friendly pressure as they shook hands at parting. Miss Fanshawe neither gave nor refused her hand. He took it; he held it for a moment—that slender hand, all the world to him, clasped

in his own, yet never to be his, lodged like a stranger's for a moment there—then to go, for ever. The hand was carelessly drawn away; he let it go, and never a word spoke he.

The ladies entered the deep shadow of the trees. He listened to the light steps fainting into silent distance, till he could hear them no more.

Suspense—still suspense.

Those words spoken in her clear undertone—terrible words, that seemed at the moment to thunder in his ears, "loud as a trumpet with a silver sound"—were they, after all, words of despair, or words of hope?

"*One word more of this kind, to-night, you are not to say to me.*"

How was he to translate the word "to-night" in this awful text? It seemed, as she spoke it, introduced simply to add peremptoriness to her forbiddance. But was that its fair meaning? Did it not imply that the prohibition was limited only to that night? Might it not mean that he was free to speak more—possibly to hear more—at a future time?

A riddle? Well! he would read it in the way most favourable to his hopes; and who will blame him? He would have no oracles—no ambiguities—nothing but sharply defined certainty.

With an insolent spirit, instinct with an impatience and impetuosity utterly intolerant of the least delay or obstruction, the interval could not be long.

CHAPTER XIX.

CLEVE VERNEY TAKES A BOLD STEP.

When we seek danger he is sometimes—like death—hard to find. Cleve would not have disliked an encounter with Sir Booth Fanshawe; who could tell what might come of such a meeting? It was palpably so much the interest of that ruined gentleman to promote his wishes, that, if he would only command his temper and listen to reason, he had little doubt of enlisting him zealously in his favour. It was his own uncle who always appeared to him the really formidable obstacle.

Therefore, next night, Cleve fearlessly walked down to Malory. It was seven o'clock, and dark. It was a still, soft night. The moon not up yet, and all within the gate, dark as Erebus—silent, also, except for the fall of a dry leaf now and then, rustling sadly through the boughs.

At the gate for a moment he hesitated, and then with a sudden decision, pushed it open, entered, and the darkness received him. A little confused were his thoughts and feelings as he strode through that darkness and silence toward the old house. So dark it was, that to direct his steps, he had to look up for a streak of sky between the nearly meeting branches of the trees.

This trespass was not a premeditated outrage. It was a sudden inspiration of despair. He had thought of writing to Sir Booth. But to what mischief might not that fierce and impracticable old man apply his overt act? Suppose he were to send his letter on to the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney? In that case Mr. Cleve Verney might moralize with an income of precisely two hundred a year, for the rest of his days, upon the transitory nature of all human greatness. At the next election he would say a compulsory farewell to the House. He owed too much money to remain pleasantly in England, his incensed uncle would be quite certain to marry, and with Cleve Verney—ex-M.P., and quondam man of promise, and presumptive Earl of Verney—*conclamatum foret.*

He had therefore come to the gate of Malory in the hope of some such happy chance as befel the night before. And now disappointed, he broke through all considerations, and was walking, in a sort of desperation, right into the lion's mouth.

He slackened his pace, however, and bethought him. Of course, he could not ask at this hour to see Miss Anne Sheckleton. Should he go and pay a visit to old Rebecca Mervyn? Hour and circumstances considered, would not that, also, be a liberty and an outrage? What would they think

of it? What would *he* say of it in another fellow's case? Was he then going at this hour to pay his respects to Sir Booth Fenshawe, whom he had last seen and heard in the thunder and dust of the hustings, hurling language and grammar that were awful, at his head.

Cleve Verney was glad that he had pulled up before he stood upon the door steps; and he felt like an awakened somnambulist.

"I *can't* do this. It's *impossible.* What a brute I am growing," thought Cleve, awaking to realities. "There's nothing for it, I believe, but patience. If I were now to press for an answer, she would say 'No;' and were I to ask admission at the house at this hour, what would she—what would Miss Sheckleton, even, think of me? If I had nerve to go away and forget her, I should be happier—quite happy and quite good-for-nothing, and perfectly at my uncle's disposal. As it is, I'm *miserable*—a miserable *fool.* Everything against it—even the girl, I believe; and I here—partly in a vision of paradise, partly in the torments of the damned, wasting my life in the dream of an opium-eater, and without power to break from it, and see the world as it is."

He was leaning with folded arms, like the melancholy Jaques, against the trunk of a forest tree, as this sad soliloquy glided through his mind, and he heard a measured step approaching slowly from the house.

"This is Sir Booth coming," thought he, with a strange, sardonic gladness. "We shall see what will come of it. Let us hear the old gentleman, by all means."

The step was still distant.

It would have been easy for him to retrace his steps, and to avoid the encounter. But it seemed to him that to stir would have been like moving a mountain, and a sort of cold defiance kept him there, and an unspeakable interest in the story which he was enacting, and a longing to turn over the leaf, and read the next decisive page. So he waited.

His conjecture was right, but the anticipated dialogue did not occur. The tall figure of Sir Booth appeared; some wrappers thrown across his arm. He stalked on and passed by Cleve, without observing, or rather, seeing him; for his eye had not grown like Cleve's, accustomed to the darkness.

Cleve stood where he was till the step was lost in silence, and waited for some time longer, and heard Sir Booth's voice, as he supposed, hailing the boatmen from that solitary shore, and theirs replying, and he thought of the ghostly boat and boatmen that used to scare him in the "Tale of Wonder" beloved in his boyhood. For anything that remains to him in life, for any retrospect but one of remorse, he might as well be one of those phantom boatmen on the haunted lake. By this time he is gliding, in the silence of his secret thoughts, upon the dark sea outside Malory.

"Well!" thought Cleve, with a sudden inspiration, "he will not return for two hours at least. I *will* go on—no great harm in merely passing the house—and we shall see whether anything turns up.

On went Cleve. The approach to the old house is not a very long one. On a sudden, through the boughs, the sight of lighted windows met his eyes, and through the open sash of one of them, he heard faintly the pleasant sound of female prattle.

He drew nearer. He stood upon the esplanade before the steps, under the well-known gray front of the old house. A shadow crossed the window, and he heard Miss Anne Sheckleton's merry voice speaking volubly, and then a little silence, of which he availed himself to wálk with as distinct a tread as he could manage, at a little distance, in front of the windows, in the hope of exciting the attention of the inmates. He succeeded; for almost at the instant two shadowy ladies, the lights being within the room, and hardly any from without, appeared at the open window; Miss Sheckleton was in front, and Miss Fanshawe with her hand leaning upon her old cousin's shoulder, looked out also.

Cleve stopped instantly, and approached, raising his hat. This young gentleman was also a mere dark outline, and much less distinct than those he recognised against the cheery light of the drawing-room candles. But I don't think there was a moment's doubt about his identity.

"Here I am, actually detected, trying to glide by unperceived," said

Cleve, lying, as *Mr. Fag* says in the play, and coming up quickly to the open window. "You must think me quite mad, or the most impudent person alive; but what am I to do? I can't leave Ware, without paying old Rebecca—Mrs. Mervyn, you know—a visit. Lady Verney blows me up so awfully about it, and has put it on me as a duty. She thinks there's no one like old Rebecca; and really poor old Mervyn was always very kind to me when I was a boy. She lives, you know, in the steward's house. I can't come up here in daylight. I'm in such a dilemma. I must wait till Sir Booth has gone out in his boat, don't you see? and so I did; and if I had just got round the corner there, without your observing me, I should have been all right. I'm really quite ashamed. I must look so like a trespasser—a poacher—everything that is suspicious; but the case, you see, is really so difficult. I've told you everything, and I do hope you quite acquit me."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Sheckleton. "We *must*, you know. It's like a piece of a Spanish comedy; but what's to be done? You must have been very near meeting. Booth has only just gone down to the boat."

"We did meet—that is, he actually passed me by, but without seeing me. I heard him coming, and just stood, taking my chance; it was very dark you know."

"Well, I forgive you," said Miss Sheckleton. "I must, you know; but the dogs won't. You hear them in the yard. What good dear creatures they are; and when they hear us talking to you, they'll grow quite quiet, and understand that all is well, they are *so* intelligent. And there's the boat; look, Margaret, through *that* opening, you can just see it. When the moon gets up, it looks so pretty. I suppose it's my bad taste, but those clumsy fishing boats seem to me so much more picturesque than your natty yachts, though, of course, *they* are very nice in their way. Do you hear how *furious* you have made our great dog, poor old Neptune! He looks upon us, Margaret and I, as in his special charge; but it does not do, making such an uproar."

I fancy she was thinking of Sir Booth, for she glanced toward the boat; and perhaps the kind old lady was thinking of somebody else, also.

"I'll just run to the back window, and quiet him. I shan't be away a moment, Margaret, dear."

And away went Miss Sheckleton, shutting the door. Miss Fanshawe had not said a word, but remained at the window looking out. You might have thought his being there, or not, a matter of entire indifference to her. She had not said a word. She looked toward the point at which the rising splendour of the moon was already visible over the distant hills.

"Did you miss anything—I'm sure you did—yesterday? I found a pin at the jetty of Penruthyn. It is so pretty, I've been ever so much tempted to keep it; so very pretty, that somehow, I think it could not have belonged to any one but to you."

And he took the trinket from his waistcoat pocket.

"Oh! I'm so glad," said she; "I thought I had seen it this morning, and could not think what had become of it. I never missed it till this evening."

He touched the fingers she extended to receive it. He took them in his hand, and held them with a gentle force.

"For one moment allow me to hold your hand; don't take it from me yet. I *implore*, only while I say a few words, which you may make, almost by a look, a farewell—my eternal farewell. Margaret, I love you as no other man ever will love you. You think all this but the madness that young men talk. I know nothing of them. What I say is desperately true, no madness, but sad and irreparable reality. I never knew love but for you—and for you it is such idolatry as I think the world never imagined. You are never for one moment from my thoughts. Every good hope or thought I have, I owe to you. You are the good principle of my life, and if I lose you, I am lost myself."

This strange girl was not a conventional young lady. I don't pronounce whether she was better or worse for that. She did not drop her eyes, nor yet withdraw her hand. She left that priceless pledge in his, it seemed, unconsciouly, and with eyes of melancholy and earnest inquiry, looked on the handsome young man that was pleading with her.

"It is strange," she said in a dreamy tone, as if talking with herself. "I said it was strange, for he does not, and cannot know me."

"Yes," he answered, "I do know you—intuitively I know you. We have all faith in the beautiful. We cannot separate the beautiful and the good; they come both direct from God, they resemble him; and I know your power—you can make of me what you will. Oh, Margaret, will you shut me out for ever from the only chance of good I shall ever know? Can you ever, ever like me?"

There was a little silence, and she said, very low, "If I *were* to like you, would you love me better than anything else in all the world?"

"Than all the world—than all the world," he reiterated, and she felt the hand of this young man of fashion, of ambition, who had years ago learned to sneer at all romance, quiver as it held her own.

"But first, if I were to allow any one to like me, I would say to him you must know what you undertake. You must love me with your entire heart; heart and soul, you must give yourself altogether up to me. I must be everything to you—your present, your future, your happiness, your hope; for I will not bear to share your heart with anything on *earth!* and these are hard terms, but the only ones."

"I need make *no* vow, darling—*darling*. My life is what you describe, and I cannot help it; I adore you. Oh! Margaret, *can* you like me?"

Then Margaret Fanshawe answered, and in a tone the most sad, I think, that ever spoke; and to *him*, the sweetest and most solemn; like distant music in the night, funereal and plaintive, the cadences fell upon his entranced ear.

"If I were to say I could like you enough to *wait*, and *try* if I could like you more, it always seemed to me so awful a thing—try if I could like you more—would not the terms seem to you too hard?"

"Oh! Margaret, darling, say you *can* like me *now*. You know how I adore you," he implored.

"Here, then, is the truth. I do not like you well enough to say all that; no, I do *not*, but I like you too well to say *go*. I don't know how it *may* be, but if you choose to wait, and give me a very little time to resolve, I shall see clearly, and all uncertainty come to an end, *some*how, and God guide us all to good! That is the whole truth, Mr. Verney; and pray say no more at present. You shall not wait long for my answer."

"I agree, darling. I accept your terms. You don't know what delay is to me; but anything rather than despair."

She drew her hand to herself. He released it. It was past all foolish bye-play with him, and the weight of a strange fear lay upon his heart.

This little scene took longer in speaking and acting, than it does in reading in this poor note of mine. When they looked up, the moon was silvering the tops of the trees, and the distant edges of the Welsh mountains, and glimmering and flashing to and fro, like strings of diamonds, on the water.

And now Miss Anne Sheckleton entered, having talked old Neptune into good humour.

"Is there a chance of your visiting Penruthyn again?" asked Cleve, as if nothing unusual had passed. "You have not seen the old park. *Pray*, come to-morrow."

Miss Sheckleton looked at the young lady, but she made no sign.

"*Shall* we? *I* see nothing against it," said she.

"Oh! *do*. I entreat," he persisted.

"Well, if it should be fine, and if nothing prevents, I think, I may say, we *will*, about three o'clock to-morrow."

Margaret did not speak; but was there not something sad and even gentle in her parting? The old enigma was still troubling his brain and heart, as he walked down the dark avenue once more. How would it all end? How would she at last pronounce?

The walk, next day, was taken in the Warren, as he had proposed. I believe it was a charming excursion; as happy, too, as under the bitter conditions of suspense, it could be; but nothing worthy of record was spoken, and matters, I dare say, remained, ostensibly at least, precisely as they were.

CHAPTER XX.

HIS FATE.

CLEVE VERNEY, as we know, was a young gentleman in whose character were oddly mingled impetuosity and caution. A certain diplomatic reserve and slyness had often stood him in stead in the small strategy of life, and here, how skilfully had he not managed his visits to Penruthyn, and hid from the peering eyes of Cardyllian his walks and loiterings about the enchanted woods of Malory.

Visiting good Mrs. Jones's shop next day, to ask her how she did, and gossip a little across the counter, that lady peering over her spectacles, received him with a particularly sly smile, which, being prone to alarms just then, he noted and did not like.

Confidential and voluble as usual, was this lady, bringing her black lace cap and purple ribbons close to the brim of Mr. Verney's hat, as she leaned over the counter, and murmured her emphatic intelligence and surmises deliberately in his ear. She came at last to say—

"You must be very *sol*itary, we all think, over there, at Ware, sir; and though you have your yacht to sail across in, and your dog-cart to trot along, and doesn't much mind, still it is not con*venient*, you know, for one that likes *this* side so much better than the other. We think, and *wonders*, we all do, you wouldn't stay awhile at the Verney Arms, over the way, and remain among us, you know, and be near everything you might like; the other side, you know, is very dull; we can't deny *that*, though it's quite true that Ware is a very fine place—a really *beau*tiful place—but it *is* lonely, we must allow; *mustn't* we?"

"Awfully lonely," acquiesced Cleve, "but I don't quite see why I should live at the Verney Arms, notwithstanding."

"Well, they do say—you mustn't be angry with them, you know—but they do, that you like a walk to Malory," and this was accompanied with a wonderfully cunning look, and a curious play of the crow's-feet and wrinkles of her fat face, and a sly, gentle laugh. "But *I* don't mind."

"Don't mind *what?*" asked Cleve a little sharply.

"*Well*, I don't mind what they *say*, but they *do* say you have made acquaintance with the Malory family—no harm in that, you know."

"No harm in the world, only a lie," said Cleve, with a laugh that was not quite enjoying. "I wish they would manage that introduction for me; I should like it extremely. I think the young lady rather pretty—don't you? and I should not object to pay my respects, if you think it would not be odd. My Cardyllian friends know so much better than I what is the right thing to do. That fact is, I don't know one of our own tenants there, except for taking off my hat twice to the only sane one of the party, that old Miss Anne—Anne—*something*—you told me"——

"*Sheckleton* that will *be*," supplemented Mrs. Jones.

"Sheckleton. Very well; and my real difficulty is this—and upon my honour, I don't know how to manage it. My grandmother, Lady Verney, puts me under orders—and you know she does not like to be disobeyed—to go and see poor old Rebecca, Mrs. Mervyn, you know, at the steward's house, at Malory; and I am looking for a moment when these people are out of the way, just to run in for five minutes, and ask her how she does. And my friend, Wynne Williams, won't let me tell Lady Verney how odd these people are, he's so afraid of her hearing the rumour of their being mad. But the fact is, whenever I go up there and peep in through the trees, I see some of them about the front of the house, and I can't go up to the door, of course, without annoying them, for they wish to be quite shut up; and the end of it is, I say, that, among them, I shall get blown up by Lady Verney, and shan't know what to answer—by Jove! But you may tell my friends in Cardyllian, I am so much obliged to them for giving me credit for more cleverness than *they* have had in effecting an introduction; and talking of me about that pretty girl, Miss—oh!—what's her name?—at Malory. I only hope she's not mad; for if she is *I* must be also."

Mrs. Jones listened, and looked

at him more gravely, for his story hung pretty well together, and something of its cunning died out of the expression of her broad face. But Cleve walked away a little disconcerted, and by no means in a pleasant temper with his good neighbours of Cardyllian; and made that day a long visit at Hazelden, taking care to make his approaches as ostentatiously as he could. And he was seen for an hour in the evening, walking on the green with the young ladies of that house, Miss Charity flanking the little line of march on one side, and he the other, pretty Miss Agnes, of the golden locks, the pretty dimples, and brilliant tints, walking between, and listening, I'm afraid, more to the unphilosophic prattle of young Mr. Verney, than to the sage conversation, and even admonitions and reminders of her kind, but unexceptionable sister.

From the news-room windows, from the great bow-window of the billiard-room, this promenade was visible. It was a judicious demonstration, and gave a new twist to conjecture; and listless gentlemen who chronicled and discussed such matters, observed upon it, each according to his modicum of eloquence and wisdom.

Old Vane Etherage, whose temperament, though squally, was placable, was won by the frank courtesy, and adroit flatteries of the artless young fellow who had canvassed boroughs and counties, and was master of a psychology of which honest old Etherage knew nothing.

That night, notwithstanding, Cleve was at the gate of Malory, and the two ladies were there.

"We have been looking at the boat ten minutes, just, since it left. Sir Booth is out as usual, and now see how far away; you can scarcely see the sail, and yet so little breeze."

"The breeze is rather from the shore, and you are sheltered here, all this old wood, you know. But you can hear it a little in the tops of the trees," Cleve answered, caring very little what way the breeze might blow, and yet glad to know that Sir Booth was on his cruise, and quite out of the way for more than an hour to come.

"We intended venturing out as far as the pier, there to enjoy once more that beautiful moonlight view, but Sir Booth went out to-night by the little door down there, and this has been left with its padlock on. So we must only treat this little recess as the convent parlour, with the grating here, at which we parley with our friends. *Do* you hear that foolish old dog again? I really believe he has got out of the yard," suddenly exclaimed good-natured Miss Anne, who made the irregularities of old Neptune an excuse for trifling absences, very precious to Cleve Verney.

So now, she walked some ten or twenty steps toward the house, and stood there looking up the avenue, and prattling incessantly, though Cleve could not hear a word she said, except now and then the name of "Neptune," when she ineffectually accosted that remote offender.

"You have not said a word, Miss Fanshawe, you are not offended with me, I hope," he murmured.

"Oh, no."

"You have not shaken hands," he continued, and he put his hand between the bars, "won't you?"

So she placed hers in his.

"And now, can you tell me nothing?"

"I've been thinking that I may as well speak now," she said, in very low tones. "There must be uncertainty, I believe, in all things, and faith in those who love us, and trust that all may end in good; and so, *blindly—almost* blindly—I say, yes, if you will promise me—oh! *promise*, that you will always love me, as you do now, and never change. If you love me, I shall love you, *always;* and if you change, I shall *die.* Oh! won't you promise?"

Poor fluttering heart! The bird that prunes its wing for the untried flight over the sea, in which to tire, is to die, lonely, in the cold waste, may feel within its little breast the instinct of that irrevocable venture, the irresistible impulse, the far-off hope, the present fear and danger, as she did.

Promises! What are they? Who can answer for the follies of the heart, and the mutations of time. We know what we are; we know what we may be. Idlest of all idle words are these promises for the affections, for the raptures and illusions, utterly mortal, whose duration God has placed quite beyond our control. Kill them, indeed, we may, but add one hour to their uncertain lives, never.

Poor trembling heart! "Promise never to change. Oh! won't you promise?" Promises spoken to the air, written in dust—yet a word, a look, like a blessing or a hope—ever so illusive, before the wing is spread, and the long and untried journey begins!

What Cleve Verney swore, and all the music he poured into those little listening ears in that enchanting hour, I know not.

Miss Anne Sheckleton came back. Through the convent bars Cleve took her hand, in a kind of agitation, a kind of tumult, with rapture in his handsome face, and just said, "She has told me, she *will*," and Miss Sheckleton said nothing, but put her arms round Margaret's neck, and kissed her many times, and holding her hand, looked up smiling, and took Cleve's also, and in the old spinster's eyes were glittering those diamond tears, so pure and unselfish that, when we see them, we think of those that angels are said to weep over the sorrows and the vanities of human life.

Swiftly flew the hour, and not till the sail was nearing the shore, and the voices of the boatmen were audible across the water, did the good old lady insist on a final farewell, and Cleve glided away, under the shadow of the trees that overhang the road, and disappeared round the distant angle of the wall of Malory.

CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTAIN SHRAPNELL.

The next afternoon Miss Charity Etherage and her sister Agnes, were joined in their accustomed walk upon the green of Cardyllian by Captain Shrapnell, a jaunty half-pay officer of five-and-fifty, who represented to his own satisfaction, the resident youth and fashion of that quiet watering-place.

"I give you my honour, Miss Etherage," said he, placing himself beside Miss Agnes, "I mistook you yesterday, for Lady Fanny Mersey. Charming person she is, and I need not say, perfectly lovely." A little arch bow gave its proper point to the compliment. "She has gone, however, I understand, left Lluinan yesterday. Is that young Verney's boat? No, oh! no—nothing like so sharp. He's a very nice fellow, young Verney."

This was put rather interrogatively, and Miss Agnes, thinking that she had blushed a little, blushed more, to her inexpressible chagrin, for she knew that Captain Shrapnell was watching her with the interest of a gossip.

"Nice? I dare say. But I really know him so very slightly," said Miss Agnes.

"Come, come; that won't do," said the Captain, very archly. "You forget that I was sitting in our club window yesterday evening, when a certain party were walking up and down. Ha, ha, you do. We're tolerably clear-sighted up there, and old Rogers keeps our windows rubbed; and the glass is quite brilliantly transparent, ha, ha, ha! hey?"

"I think your windows are made of multiplying glasses, and magnifying glasses, and every kind of glass that distorts and discolours," said Miss Agnes, a little pettishly. "I don't know how else it is that you all see such wonderful sights as you do, through them."

"Well, they *do*, certainly. Some of our friends do colour a little," said the Captain, with a waggish yet friendly grin, up at the great bow window. "But in this case, you'll allow there was no great opportunity for colour, the tints of nature are so beautiful," and Shrapnell fired off this little saying, with his bow and smile of fascination. "Nor, by Jove, for the multiplying glasses either, for more than three in that party would have quite spoiled it; now *would*n't it, hey? ha, ha, ha! The two principals, and a gooseberry, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

"What *is* a *gooseberry?*" inquired Miss Charity, peremptorily.

"A delightful object in the garden, Miss Etherage, a delightful object everywhere. The delight of the young especially, hey, Miss Agnes? ha, ha! hey? and one of the sweetest products of nature. Eh, Miss Agnes, ha, ha, ha! Miss Etherage, I give

you my honour every word I say is true."

"I do declare, Captain Shrapnell, it seems to me you have gone *perfectly mad!*" said Miss Charity, who was out-spoken and emphatic.

"Always a mad fellow, Miss Etherage, ha, ha, ha! Very true; that's my character, hey? ha, ha, ha, egad! So the ladies tell me," said the gay, young captain. "Wish I'd a guinea for every time they've called me mad, among them. I give you my honour I'd be a rich fellow this moment."

"Now, Captain Shrapnell," said Miss Charity, with a frank stare with her honest goggle eyes, "you are talking *the* greatest *nonsense I* ever heard in my life."

"Miss Agnes, here, does not think so, hey?" giggled the captain. "Now, come, Miss Agnes, what do you think of young Verney, hey? There's a question."

How Miss Agnes hated the gibing, giggling wretch, and detested the Club of whose prattle and gossip he was the inexhaustible spokesman; and would at that moment have hailed the appearance of a ship-of-war with her broadside directed upon the bow window of that haunt, with just, of course, such notice to her worthy father, whose gray head was visible in it, as was accorded to the righteous Lot—under orders, with shot, shell, rockets, and marlin-spikes, to blow the entire concern into impalpable dust.

It must be allowed that Miss Agnes was unjust; that it would not have been fair to visit upon the harmless and, on the whole, good-natured persons who congregated in that lively receptacle, and read the *Times* through their spectacles there, the waggeries and exaggerations of the agreeable captain, and to have reached that incorrigible offender, and demolished his stronghold at so great a waste of human life.

"Come, now; I won't let you off, Miss Aggie. I say, *there's* a question. What do you say? Come, now, you really must tell us. What *do* you think of young Verney?"

"If you wish to know what *I* think," interposed Miss Charity, "I think he's *the very nicest* man I *ever* spoke to. He's *so* nice about religion. Wasn't he, Aggie?"

Here the Captain exploded.

"Religion! egad—do you really mean to tell me—ha, ha, ha! Upon my soul, that's the richest thing!—now, *really!*"

"My goodness! How frightfully wicked you are," exclaimed Miss Charity.

"True bill, egad; upon my soul, I'm afraid—ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, Captain Shrapnell, you *shall not* walk with us, if you swear," said Miss Charity.

"*Swear!* I didn't swear, did I? Very sorry if I did, upon my—I give you my word," said the Captain, politely.

"Yes, you *did;* and it's *extremely wicked,*" said Miss Charity.

"Well, I won't; I swear to you, I won't," vowed the Captain, a little inconsistently; "but now about Master Cleve Verney, Miss Agnes. I said I would not let you off, and I won't. I give you my honour, you shall say what you think of him, or, by Jove!—I conclude you can't trust yourself on the subject, ha, ha, ha! Hey?"

"You *are* mad, Captain Shrapnell," interposed Miss Charity, with weight.

"I can't say, really, I've formed any particular opinion. I think he is rather agreeable," answered Miss Agnes, under this pressure.

"Well, so do *I*," acquiesced the Captain. "Master Cleve can certainly be agreeable where he chooses, and you think him devilish good-looking—don't you?"

"I really can't say—he has very good features—but ——"

"But what? Why every one allows that Verney's as good-looking a fellow as you'll meet with anywhere," persisted the Captain.

"*I* think him *per*fectly *be-au*tiful!" said Miss Charity, who never liked people by halves.

"Well—yes—he may be handsome," said Miss Agnes; "I'm no very great critic; but I can't conceive any girl falling in love with him."

"Oh! as to *that*—but—*why?*" said Captain Shrapnell.

"His face, I think, is so selfish—somehow," she said.

"Is it now, really?—*how?*" asked the Captain.

"I'm *am-azed* at you!" exclaimed Miss Charity.

"Well, there's a selfish hook—no, not a hook, a *curve*—of his nose,

and a cruel crook of his shoulder," said Miss Agnes, in search of faults.

"You're determined to hit him by hook or by crook—ha, ha, ha—I say," pursued the Captain.

"A *hook!*" exclaimed Miss Charity, almost angrily; "there's *no* hook!—I *wonder* at you—I really think sometimes, Agnes, you're the greatest *fool* I ever met in the whole course of my life!"

"Well, I can't help thinking what I think," said Agnes.

"But you *don't* think *that*—you *know* you don't—you *can't* think it," decided her elder sister.

"No more she does," urged the Captain, with his teazing giggle; "she *doesn't* think it; you always know when a girl abuses a man, she *likes* him—she does—by Jove—and I venture to say she thinks Master Cleve one of the very handsomest and most fascinating fellows she ever beheld," said the agreeable Captain.

"I really think what I said," replied Agnes, and her pretty face showed a brilliant colour, and her eyes had a handsome fire in them, for she was vexed; "though it is natural to think in a place like this, where all the men are more or less old and ugly, that any young man, even tolerably good-looking, should be thought a wonder."

"Ha, ha, ha! very good," said the the Captain, plucking out his whisker a little, and twiddling his moustache, and glancing down at his easy waistcoat, and perhaps ever so little put out; but he also saw over his shoulder Cleve crossing the Green towards them from the Jetty, and not perhaps being quite on terms to call him "Master Cleve" to his face, he mentioned a promise to meet young Owen of Henlwyd in the billiard-room for a great game of pyramid, and so took off his hat gracefully to the ladies, and, smirking, and nodding, and switching his cane, swaggered swiftly away toward the point of rendezvous.

So Cleve arrived, and joined the young ladies, and walked beside Agnes, chatting upon all sorts of subjects, and bearing some occasional reproofs and protests from Miss Charity with great submission and gaiety, and when Miss Charity caught a glimpse of "the Admiral's" bath-chair, with that used-up officer in it, *en route*, for the Hazelden-road, and already near the bridge, she plucked her watch from her belt, with a slight pallor in her cheek, and "*declared*" she had not an idea how late it was. Cleve Verney accompanied the ladies all the way to Hazeldon, and even went in, when bidden, and drank a cup of tea, at their early meal, and obeyed also a summons to visit the "Admiral" in his study.

"Very glad to see you, sir—very happy, Mr. Verney," said Mr. Vane Etherage, with his fez upon his head, and lowering his pipe with the gravity of a Turk. "I wish you would come and dine at three o'clock—the true hour for dinner, sir—I've tried every hour, in my time, from twelve to half-past eight—at three o'clock, sir, some day—any day—to-morrow. The Welsh mutton is the best on earth, and the Hazelden mutton is the best in Wales!" The "Admiral" always looked in the face of the person whom he harangued, with an expression of cool astonishment, which somehow aided the pomp of his delivery. "An unfortunate difference, Mr. Verney—a dispute, sir—has arisen between me and your uncle; but that, Mr. Verney, need not extend to his nephew; no, sir, it need *not;* no need it should. Shall we say to-morrow, Mr. Verney?"

I forget what excuse Mr. Verney made; it was sufficient, however, and he was quite unable to name an immediate day, but lived in hope. So having won golden opinions, he took his leave. And the good people of Cardyllian, who make matches easily, began to give Mr. Cleve Verney to pretty Miss Agnes Etherage.

While this marrying and giving in marriage was going on over many tea-tables, that evening, in Cardyllian, Mr. Cleve Verney, the hero of this new romance, had got ashore a little below Malory, and at nightfall walked down the old road by Llanderris church, and so round the path that skirts the woods of Malory, and down upon the shore that winds before the front of the old house.

As he came full in sight of the shore, on a sudden, within little more than a hundred paces away, he saw, standing solitary upon the shingle, a tall man, with a tweed rug across his arm, awaiting a boat which

was slowly approaching in the distance.

In this tall figure he had no difficulty in recognizing Sir Booth Fanshawe, whom he had confronted in other, and very different scenes, and who had passed so near him, in the avenue at Malory.

With one of those sudden and irresistible impulses, which, as they fail or succeed, are classed as freaks of madness, or inspirations of genius, he resolved to walk up to Sir Booth, and speak to him upon the subject then so near to his heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

SIR BOOTH SPEAKS.

The idea, perhaps, that sustained Cleve Verney in this move, was the sudden recurrence of his belief that Sir Booth would so clearly see the advantages of such a connexion as to forget his resentments.

Sir Booth was looking sea-ward, smoking a cigar, and watching the approach of the boat, which was still distant. As Cleve drew near, he saw Sir Booth eye him, he fancied, uneasily; and throwing back his head a little, and withdrawing his cheroot, ever so little from his lips, the Baronet demanded grimly—

"Wish to speak to *me*, sir?"

"Only a word, if you allow me," answered Cleve, approaching.

On ascertaining that he had to deal with a gentleman, Sir Booth was confident once more.

"Well, sir, I hear you," said he.

"You don't recognize me, Sir Booth; and I fear when I introduce myself, you will hardly connect my name with anything pleasant or friendly. I only ask a patient hearing, and I am sure your own sense of fairness will excuse me personally."

"Before you say more, sir, I should like to know for whom you take me, and why; I don't recollect *you*—I *think*—I can't see very well—no one does, in this sort of light; but I rather think, I never saw your face before, sir—nor you mine, I dare say—your guesses as to who I am, may be anything you please—and quite mistaken—and this is not a usual time, you know, for talking with strangers about business—and, in fact, I've come here for quiet and my health, and I can't undertake to discuss other people's affairs—I find my own as much as my health and leisure will allow me to attend to."

"Sir Booth Fanshawe, you must excuse me for saying I know you perfectly. I am also well aware that you seek a little repose and privacy here, and you may rely implicitly upon my mentioning your name to no one; in fact, I have been for some weeks aware of your residing at Malory, and never *have* mentioned it to any one."

"Ha! you're *very* kind, indeed—taking *great* care of me, sir; you are very obliging," said Sir Booth sarcastically, "I'm sure; ha, ha! I ought to be very grateful. And to whom, may I ask, do I owe all this attention to my—my *interests* and comforts?"

"I am connected, Sir Booth, with a house that has unfortunately been a good deal opposed, in politics, to yours. There are reasons which make this particularly painful to me, although I have been by the direction of others, whom I had no choice but to obey, more in evidence in these miserable contests than I could wish; I've really been little more than a passive instrument in the hands of others, absolutely without power, or even influence of my own in the matter. You don't recognize me, but you have seen me elsewhere. My name is Cleve Verney."

Sir Booth had not expected this name, as his countenance showed. With a kind of jerk, he removed his cigar from his lips, sending a shower of red sparks away on the breeze, and gazing on the young man with eyes like balls of stone, ready to leap from their sockets. I dare say he was very near exploding in that sort of language which, on occasion, he did not spare. But he controlled himself, and said merely, clearing his voice first—

"That will do, sir, the name's enough; I can't be supposed to wish to converse with any one of that name, sir—no more I do."

"What I have to say, Sir Booth,

affects *you*, it interests you very *nearly*," answered Cleve.

"But, sir, I'm going out in that boat—I wish to smoke my cigar—I've come down here to live to myself, and to be alone when I choose it," said Sir Booth with suppressed exasperation.

"One word, I beg—you'll not regret it, Sir Booth," pleaded Cleve.

"Well, sir—come—I *will* hear it; but I tell you beforehand, I have pretty strong views as to how I have been used, and it is not likely to lead to much," said Sir Booth, with one of those sudden changes of purpose to which fiery men are liable.

So, as briefly and as persuasively as he could, Cleve Verney disclosed his own feelings, giving to the date of his attachment, skilfully, a retrospective character, and guarding the ladies of Malory from the unreasonable temper of this violent old man; and, in fact, from Cleve's statement you would have gathered that he was not even conscious that the ladies were now residing at Malory. He closed his little confession with a formal proposal.

Was there something—ever so little—in the tone of this latter part of his brief speech, that reflected something of the confidence to which I have alluded, and stung the angry pride of this ruined man? He kept smoking his cigar a little faster, and looking steadily at the distant boat that was slowly approaching against the tide.

When Cleve concluded, the old man lowered his cigar and laughed shortly and scornfully.

"You do us a great deal of honour, Mr. Verney—too much honour, by ——," scoffed the Baronet. "Be so good at all events as to answer me this one question frankly—yes or no. Is your uncle, Kyffin Verney, aware of your speaking to me on this subject?"

"*No*, Sir Booth, he is not," said Cleve; "he knows nothing of it. I ought, perhaps, to have mentioned that at first."

"So you ought," said Sir Booth brusquely.

"And I beg that you won't mention the subject to him."

"You may be very sure I shan't, sir," said the Baronet fiercely. "Why, d—n it, sir, what do you mean? Do you know what you're saying? You come here, and you make a proposal for my daughter, and you think I should be so charmed that rather than risk your alliance I should practise any meanness you think fit. D—n you, sir, how dare you suppose I could fancy your aspiring to my daughter a thing to hide like a mesalliance?"

"Nothing of the kind, Sir Booth."

"*Every*thing of the kind, sir. Do you know who you are, sir? You have not a farthing on earth, sir, but what you get from your uncle."

"I beg your pardon—allow me, Sir Booth—I've six hundred a year of my own. I know it's very little; but I've been thought to have some energies; I know I have some friends. I have still my seat in the House, and this Parliament may last two or three years. It is quite possible that I may quarrel with my uncle; I can't help it; I'm quite willing to take my chance of that; and I entreat, Sir Booth, that you won't make this a matter of personal feeling, and attribute to me the least sympathy with the miserable doings of my uncle."

Sir Booth listened to him, looking over the sea as before, as if simply observing the approach of the boat, but he spoke this time in a mitigated tone.

"You're no young man," said he, "if you don't owe money. I never knew one with a rich old fellow at his back who didn't."

He paused, and Cleve looked down.

"In fact, you don't know how much you owe. If you were called on to book up, d'ye see, there might remain very little to show for your six hundred a year. You're just your uncle's nephew, sir, and nothing more. When you quarrel with him you're a ruined man."

"I don't see *that*——" began Cleve.

"But I do. If he quarrels with you, he'll never rest till he ruins you. That's his character. It might be very different if you had a *gentleman* to deal with; but you must look the thing in the face. You may never succeed to the title. We old fellows have our palsies and apoplexies; and you, young fellows, your fevers and inflammations. Here you are quite well, and a fever comes, and turns you off like a gaslight the day after; and beside, if you quarrel he'll marry,

and where are you *then?* And I tell you frankly if Mr. Kyffin Verney has objections to me, I've stronger to him. There's no brother of mine disgraced. Why, his elder brother—its contamination to a gentleman to name him."

"He's dead, sir; Arthur Verney is dead," said Cleve, who was more patient under Sir Booth's bitter language than under any other circumstances he would have been.

"Oh? Well, that does not very much matter," said Sir Booth. "But this is the upshot: I'll have nothing underhand—all above board, sir—and if Mr. Kyffin Verney writes a proper apology—by —— he owes me one—and puts a stop to the fiendish persecutions he has been directing against me, and himself submits the proposal you have—yes—done me the honour to make, and undertakes to make suitable settlements, I shan't stand in the way; I shan't object to your speaking to my daughter, though I can't the least tell how she'll take it; and I tell you from myself *I* don't like it—I *don't*, by ——, I don't *like* it. He's a bad fellow—a nasty dog, sir, as any in England—but *that's* what I say, sir, and I shan't alter; and you'll please never to mention the subject to me again except on these conditions: except from him I decline to *hear* of it—not a word—and—and, sir, you'll please to regard my name as a secret; it has been hitherto; my liberty depends on it. Your uncle can't possibly know I'm here?" he added sharply.

"When last I saw him—a very short time since—he thought you were in France. You, of course, rely upon my honour, Sir Booth, that no one living shall hear from me one syllable affecting your safety."

"Very good, sir. I never supposed you would; but I mean *every* one—these boatmen, and the people here. No one is to know who I am; and—and what I've said is my *ultimatum*, sir. And I'll have no correspondence, sir—no attempt to visit *any* where. You understand. By —— if you do, I'll let your uncle, Mr. Kyffin Verney, know the moment I learn it. Be so good as to *leave* me."

"Good night, sir," said Cleve.

Sir Booth nodded slightly.

The tall old man went stalking and stumbling over the shingle, toward the water's edge, still watching the boat, his cigar making a red star in the dusk, by which Christmas Owen might have steered; and the boatmen that night heard their mysterious steersman from Malory, as he sat with his hand on the tiller, talking more than usual to himself, now and then d——ing unknown persons, and backing his desultory babble to the waves, with oaths that startled those sober-tongued dissenters.

Cleve walked slowly up that wide belt of rounded gray stones, that have rattled and rolled, perhaps, for centuries there, in every returning and retreating tide, and turned at last and looked toward the tall, stately figure of the old man now taking his place in the boat. Standing in the shadow, he watched it receding as the moonlight came out over the landscape. His thoughts began to clear, and he was able to estimate, according to his own gauges and rashness, the value and effect of his interview with the angry and embittered old man.

He wondered at the patience with which he had borne this old man's impertinence—unparalleled impertinence; yet even now he could not resent it. He was the father of that beautiful Margaret. The interview was a mistake—a very mortifying ordeal it had proved—and its result was to block his path with new difficulties.

Not to approach except through the mediation of his Uncle Kyffin! He should like to see how his uncle would receive a proposal to mediate in this matter. Not to visit—not to write—neither to see nor to hear of her! Submission to such conditions was not to be dreamed of. He trampled on them, and defied all consequences.

Cleve stood on the gray shingle looking after the boat, now running swiftly with the tide. A patch of seaweed like an outstretched hand lay at his feet, and in the fitful breeze lifted a warning finger, again, and again, and again.

THE TENANTS OF MALORY.

BY J. S. LE FANU, AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARGARET HAS HER WARNING.

Next evening, I believe, Cleve saw Margaret Fanshawe, by favour of that kindest of chaperons, Miss Anne Sheckleton, at the spot where by chance they had met before—at the low bank that fences the wood of Malory, near the steep road that descends by the old church of Llanderris.

Here, in the clear glow of sunset, they met and talked under the old trees, and the good old spinster, with her spectacles on, worked at her crochet industriously, and often peered over it this way and that, it must be confessed, nervously, and with a prudence with which Cleve would gladly have dispensed, she hurried this hazardous meeting to a close.

Not ten minutes later Margaret Fanshawe stood alone at the old refectory window, which commands through the parting trees a view of the sea and the distant headland, now filmed in the aerial light and blush of sunset. I should not wonder if she had been drawn thither by the fanciful hope of seeing the passing sail of Cleve Verney's yacht—every sign and relic grows so interesting! Now is with them the season of all such things; romance has sent forth her angels; the woods, the clouds, the sea, the hills, are filled with them. Then is the play of fancy and the yearning of the heart—and the aching comes in its time.

Something sadder and gentler in the face than ever before. Undine has received a soul, and is changed. The boat has passed, and to catch the last glimpse of its white wing she crosses to the other side of the window, and stretches, with a long, strange gaze, till it has gone—quite gone—and everything on a sudden is darker.

With her hand still on the worn stone-shaft of the window, she leans and looks, in a dream, till the last faint tint of sunset dies on the gray mountain, and twilight is everywhere. So with a sigh, a vague trouble, and yet a wondrous happiness at her heart, she turns to leave the stone-floored chamber, and at the head of the steps that lead down from its door she is startled.

The pale old woman, with large, earnest eyes, was at the foot of this stone stair, with her hand on the rude banister. It seemed to Margaret as if she had been waiting for her. Her great vague eyes were looking into hers as she appeared at the door.

Margaret arrested her step, and a little frown of fear for a moment curved her eyebrows. She did fear this old Rebecca Mervyn with an odd apprehension that she had something unpleasant to say to her.

"I'm coming up to you," said the old woman sadly, still looking at her as she ascended the steps.

Margaret's heart misgave her, but somehow she had not nerve to evade the interview, or rather, she had felt that it was coming and wished it over.

Once or twice in passing, the old woman had seemed to hesitate, as if about to speak to her, but had changed her mind and passed on. Only the evening before, just at the hour when the last ray of the sun comes from the west, and all the birds are singing their last notes, as she was tying up some roses, on the short terrace round the corner of the old mansion, she turned and raised her eyes, and in the window of the old building called the "Steward's House," the lattice being open, she saw, looking steadfastly upon her, from the shadows within, the pale face of this old woman. In its expression there was something ominous, and when she saw Margaret looking straight at her, she did not turn away, but looked on sadly, as unmoved as a picture, till Margaret, disconcerted, lowered her eyes, and went away.

As this old woman ascended the

stairs, Margaret crossed the floor to the window—light is always reassuring—and leaning at its side, looked back, and saw Rebecca Mervyn already within the spacious chamber, and drawing near slowly from the shadow.

"You wish to speak to me, Mrs. Mervyn?" said the young lady, who knew her name, although now for the first time she spoke to her.

"Only a word. Ah!—yes—you *are—very* beautiful," she said, with a deep sigh, as she stood looking at her, with a strange sadness and compassion in her gaze, that partook of the past, and the prophetic.

A little blush—a little smile—a momentary gleam of that light of triumph, in beauty so beautiful—showed that the fair apparition was mortal.

"Beauty—ah!—yes! If *it* were not here, neither would *they*. Miss Margaret!—poor thing! I've seen him. I knew him, although it is a great many years," said old Rebecca. "The moment my eyes touched him, I knew him; there is something about them all, peculiar—the Verneys, I mean—I should know a Verney anywhere, in any crowd, in any disguise. I've dreamt of him, and thought of him, and watched for him, for—how many years? God help me, I forget! since I was as young as you are. Cleve Verney is handsome, but there were others, long before—oh! ever so much more beautiful. The Verney features—ah!—yes—thinking always, dreaming, watching, burnt into my brain; they have all some points alike. I knew Cleve by that; he is more like that than to his younger self; a handsome boy he was—but, I beg pardon, it is so hard to keep thoughts from wandering."

This old woman, from long solitude, I suppose, talked to others as if she were talking to herself, and rambled on, flightily and vaguely. But on a sudden she laid her hand upon Margaret's wrist, and closing it gently, held her thus, and looked in her face with great concern.

"Why does he come so stealthily? *death* comes so, to the young and beautiful. My poor sister died in Naples. No one knew there was danger the day before she was sent away there, despaired of. Well may I say the angel of death—beautiful, insidious—that's the way they come—stealthily, mysterious—when I saw his handsome face about here—I shuddered—in the twilight—in the dark."

Margaret's cheek flushed, and she plucked her wrist to disengage it from the old woman's hand.

"You had better speak to my cousin, Miss Sheckleton. It is she who receives Mr. Verney when he comes. She has known him longer than I; at least made his acquaintance earlier," said the young lady. "I don't, I confess, understand what you mean. I've been trying, and I can't; perhaps *she* will?

"I must say this; it is on my mind," said the old woman, without letting her hand go. "There is something horrible in the future. You do not know the Verneys. They are a *cruel* race. It would be better to suffer an evil spirit into the house. Poor young lady! To be another *innocent victim*—break it off—expel him! Shut out, if you can, his face from your thoughts and your memory. It is one who knows them well who warns you. It will not come to good."

In the vague warning of this old woman, there was an echo of an indefinite fear that had lain at her own heart, for days. Neither, apart, was anything; but one seconding the other was ominous and depressing.

"Let me go, please," she said, a little brusquely, "it is growing dark, and I *must* go in. I'm sure, however, you mean what you say kindly, and I thank you for the intention, thank you, very much."

"Yes—go—I shall stay here; from here one can see across to Pendyllion, and the sea there; it will come again, I know it will, some day or night. My old eyes are weary with watching, I should know the sail again, although it is a long, long time—I've lost count of the years."

Thus saying she drew near the window, and without a word of farewell to Margaret, became absorbed in gazing, and Margaret left her, ran lightly down the steps, and in a minute more was in the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Days passed during which Cleve Verney paid stolen visits at Malory, more cautiously managed than ever, and nearly every afternoon did the good people of Cardyllion see him walk the green, to and fro, with the Hazelden girls, so that the subject began to be canvassed very gravely, and even Miss Charity was disposed to think that he certainly *did* like Agnes, and confided to her friend, Mrs. Brindley, of "The Cottage," that if Aggie married, *she* should *give up*. *Nothing* could induce *her*, Miss Charity, to marry, she solemnly assured her friends.

And I must do that spinster the justice to say, that there was not the faintest flavour of sour grapes in the acerbity with which she pronounced against the "shocking folly of girls marrying," for she might undoubtedly have been married, having had in her youth several unexceptionable offers, none of which had ever moved her.

I know not what hopes Sir Booth may have founded upon his conversation with Cleve Verney. Men in the Baronet's predicament nurse their hopes fondly, and their mustard seeds grow rapidly into great trees, in whose branches they shelter their families, and roost themselves. He grew gracious at times in the contemplation of brilliant possibilities, and one day, to her amazement and consternation, opened the matter briefly to Miss Sheckleton, who fancied that she was discovered, and he on the point of exploding, and felt as if she were going to faint.

Happily for her, he fancied that Cleve must have seen Margaret accidentally during some of his political knight-errantries in the county which he had contested with Sir Booth. We know, as well as Miss Sheckleton, how this really was.

Sir Booth's dreams, however, were broken with a crash. To Miss Anne Sheckleton came a letter from Sir Booth's attorneys, informing the Baronet that Mr. Kiffyn Fulke Verney had just served them with a notice which seemed to threaten a wantonly vexatious and expensive proceeding, and then desired to know what course, having detailed the respective consequences of each, he would wish them to take.

Now, Sir Booth broke into one of his frenzies, called up Miss Sheckleton, damned and cursed the whole Verney family, excommunicated them, and made the walls of Malory ring with the storm and thunder he launched at the heads of the ancient race who had built them.

Scared and pale Miss Anne Sheckleton withdrew.

"My dear, something has happened; he has had a letter from his law people, and Mr. Kiffyn Verney has directed, I think, some unexpected proceedings. How I wish they would stop these miserable lawsuits, and leave your papa at peace. Your papa's attorneys think they can gain nothing by worrying him, and it *is* so unfortunate just now."

So spoke Miss Sheckleton who had found Margaret, with her bullfinch and her squirrels, in that pretty but melancholy room which is darkened by the old wood, through whose shafted stems long, shadowy perspectives open, and there, as in the dim light of a monastic library, she was busy over the illumination of her vellum Psalter, with gold and ultramarine, and all other vivid pigments.

Margaret stood up, and looked in her face rather pale, and with her small hand pressed to her heart.

"He's *very* angry," added Miss Sheckleton, with a dark look, and a nod.

"Are we going to leave this?" inquired the girl in almost a whisper.

"He did not say; I fancy not. No, he'd have said so the first thing," answered the old lady.

"Well, we can do nothing; it can't be helped, I suppose," said Miss Margaret, looking down very sadly on her mediæval blazonry.

"Nothing, my dear; nothing on earth. No one can be more anxious that all this kind of thing should cease, than Cleve Verney, as you know; but what can even *he* do?" said Miss Sheckleton.

Margaret looked through the window, down the dark glade, and sighed.

"His uncle, Kiffyn Verney," resumed Anne Sheckleton, "is such a

disagreeable, spiteful man, and such a feud has been between them, I really don't see how it is to end; but Cleve, you know, is so clever, and so devoted, I'm sure he'll find some way."

Margaret sighed again, and said—

"Papa, I suppose, is *very* angry."

I think Sir Booth Fanshawe was the only person on earth whom that spirited girl really feared. I'm afraid there was not much good in that old man, and that most of the things I have heard of him were true. Unlike other violent men, he was not easily placable; and generally, when it was not very troublesome, remembered and executed his threats. She remembered dimly scenes between him and her dead mother. She remembered well her childish dread of his severity, and her fear of his eye and his voice had never left her.

Miss Sheckleton just lifted her fingers in the air, and raised her eyes to the ceiling, with a little shake of her head.

Margaret sighed again. I suppose she was thinking of that course of true love that never yet ran smooth, upon which the freightage of her life was ventured.

Her spinster friend looked on her sad pale face, gazing drearily into the forest shades. The solemn shadow of the inevitable, the sorrows of human life, had now for the first time begun to touch her young face. The old story was already telling itself to her, in those faint ominous musical tones that swell to solemn anthem soon; and sometimes, crash and howl at last in storm over such wreck, and in such darkness as we shut our eyes upon, and try to forget.

Old Anne Sheckleton's face saddened at the sight with a beautiful softness. She laid her thin hand on the girl's shoulder, and then put her arms about her neck, and kissed her, and said—"All will come right, darling, you'll see;" and the girl made answer by another kiss; and they stood for a minute, hand locked in hand, and the old maid smiled tenderly, a cheerful smile but pale, and patted her cheek and nodded, and with another kiss, left the room, with a mournful presage heavy at her heart.

As she passed, the stern voice of Sir Booth called to her.

"Yes," she answered.

"A word or two," he said, and she went to his room.

"I've been thinking," said he, looking at her steadily and fiercely—had some suspicion lighted up his mind since he had spoken to her?—"that young man, Cleve Verney, I believe he's still at Ware? Do you know him?"

"I should know his appearance. I saw him two or three times during that contest for the county, two years since; but he did not see me, I'm sure."

This was an evasion, but the vices of slavery always grow up under a tyranny.

"Well, *Margaret;* does *she* correspond with any one?" demanded he.

"I can answer for it, positively. Margaret has no correspondence. She writes to *no* one," she answered.

"That fellow is still at Ware. So, Christmas Owen told me last night—a place of the Verneys, at the other side—and he has got a post. I should not wonder if he were to come here, trying to see her."

So Sir Booth followed out his hypothesis, and waxed wroth, and more wroth as he proceeded, and so chafed himself into one of his paroxysms of temper. I know not what he said, but when she left him, poor Miss Sheckleton was in tears, and trembling, told Margaret, that if it were not for *her*, she would not remain another day in his house. She related to Margaret what had passed, and said—

"I almost hope Cleve Verney may not come again while we remain here. I really don't know what might be the consequence of your papa's meeting him here, in his present state of exasperation! Of course to Cleve it would be very little; but your existence, my poor child, would be made so miserable! And as for me, I tell you frankly, I should be compelled to leave you. Every one knows what Booth Fanshawe is when he is angry—how cruel he *can* be. I know he's your father, my dear, but we can't be blind to facts, and we both know that his misfortunes have not improved his temper."

Cleve nevertheless saw the ladies that day, talked with them earnestly and hurriedly, for Miss Anne Sheckleton was nervous, and miserable till

the interview ended, and submitted to the condition imposed by that kindly and panic-stricken lady, which was on no account to visit Malory as heretofore for two or three days, by the end of which time she hoped Sir Booth's anger and suspicions might have somewhat subsided.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH THE LADIES PEEP INTO CARDYLLIAN.

"My dear child," said Miss Sheckleton next day, "is not this a very wild freak, considering you have shut yourself up so closely, and not without reason? Suppose among the visiters at Cardyllian there should happen to be one who has seen and knows you, how would it be if he or she should meet and recognise you?"

"Rely on me, dear old cousin, no one shall know me."

The young lady, in a heavy, gray, Highland shawl, was standing before the looking-glass in her room as she spoke.

"Girls look all alike in these great shawls, and I shall wear my thick lace veil, through which I defy any one to see a feature of my face; and even my feet, in these strong, laced boots, are disguised. *Now—see!* I should not know myself in the glass among twenty others. I might meet you a dozen times in Cardyllian and you should not recognise me. Look and say."

"H'm—well! I must allow it would not be easy to see through all this," said Miss Sheckleton; "but don't forget and lift up your veil when you come into the town—the most unlikely people are there sometimes. Who do you think I had a bow from the other day, but old Doctor Bell, who lives in York; and the same evening in Castle-street whom should I see but my Oxford-street dressmaker! It does not matter, you know, where a solitary old maid like me is seen, but it would be quite different in your case, and who knows what danger to your papa might result from it?"

"I shan't forget—I really shan't," said the girl.

"Well, dear, I've said all I could to dissuade you, but if you *will* come I suppose you must," said Miss Anne.

"It's just as you say—a fancy," answered Margaret, "but I feel that if I were disappointed I should die."

I think, and Miss Sheckleton thought so too, that this pretty girl was very much excited that day, and could not endure the terrible stillness of Malory. Uncertainty, suspense, enforced absence from the person who loved her best in the world, and who yet is very near; dangers and hopes, quite new—no wonder if all these incidents of her situation did excite her.

It was near a week since the elder lady had appeared in the streets and shops of Cardyllian. Between the banks of the old sylvan road she and her mysterious companion walked in silence into steep Church-street, and down that quaint quarter of the town presenting houses of all dates from three centuries ago, and by the church, still older, down into Castle-street, in which, as we know, stands the shop of Jones the draper. Empty of customers was this well-garnished shop when the two ladies of Malory entered it; and Mrs. Jones raised her broad, bland, spectacled face, with a smile and a word of greeting to Miss Anne Sheckleton, and an invitation to both ladies to "be seated," and her usual inquiry, as she leaned over the counter, "And what will you be pleased to want?" and the order "John, get down the gray linseys—not *them*—those over yonder—yes, sure, you'd like to see the best—I *know* you would."

So some little time was spent over the linseys, and then,

"You're to measure thirteen yards, John, for Miss Anne Sheckleton, and send it over with trimmin's and linin's to Miss Pritchard. Miss Anne Sheckleton will speak to Miss Pritchard about the trimmin's herself."

Then Mrs. Jones observed,

"*What* a day this has been—hasn't it, Miss? And such weather, *at*together, I really don't remember in Cardyllian, *I* think *ever*."

"Yes, charming weather," acquiesced Miss Sheckleton, and just then two ladies came in and bought some velvet ribbon, which caused an interruption.

"What a pretty girl," said Miss Anne, so soon as the ladies had withdrawn. "Is that her mother?"

"Oh, no—dear, no, Miss; they are sisters," half laughed Mrs. Jones; "Don't you know who they are? No! Well, they are the Miss Etherages. There, they're going down to the green. She'll meet him there. She's going to make a *very great* match, ma'am—yes, indeed."

"Oh? But whom is she going to meet?" asked Miss Anne, who liked the good lady's gossip.

"Oh, you *don't know?* Well, dear me! I thought every one knew that. Why, Mr. Cleve, of course—young Mr. Verney. He meets her every afternoon on the green here, and walks home with the young ladies. It has been a *very* old liking—you understand—between them, and lately he has grown very pressing, and they do say—them that should know—that the Admiral—we call him—Mr. Vane Etherage—her father, has spoke to him. She has a good fortune, you know—yes, indeed—the two Miss Etherages has—we count them quite heiresses here in Cardyllian, and a very good old family too. Everybody here is pleased it is to be, and they do say Mr. Kiffyn—that is, the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney—will be very glad, too, he should settle at last, and has wrote to the young lady's father, to say how well pleased he is; for Mr. Cleve has been"—here she dropped her voice to a confidential murmur, approaching her spectacles to the very edge of her customer's bonnet, as she rested her fat arms upon the counter—"wild. Oh, dear! they do tell such *stories* of him! A pity, Miss Sheckleton—*isn't* it?—there should be so many stories to his prejudice. But, *dear* me! he *has* been wild, Miss; and now, you see, on that account it is Mr. Kiffyn—the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney—is so well pleased he should settle and take a wife that will be so liked by the people at Ware as well as at this side."

Miss Anne Sheckleton had been listening with an uneasiness, which the draper's wife fancied she saw, yet doubted her own observation; for she could not understand why her old spinster customer should care a farthing about the matter, the talk about his excursions to Malory having been quite suspended and abolished by the sustained and vigorous gossip to which his walks with Agnes Etherage, and his ostentatious attentions, had given rise.

"But Miss Etherage is hardly the kind of person—is she?—whom a young man of fashion, such as I suppose young Mr. Verney to be, would think of. She must have been very much shut up with her old father, at that quiet little place of his," suggested Miss Sheckleton.

"Shut up, Miss! Oh, dear me! Nothing of *that* sort, Miss. She is out with her sister, Miss Charity, every day, about the schools, and the Sunday classes, and the lending library, and the clothing charity, and all them things; very good of *her*, you know. I often say to her—'I *wonder*, Miss Agnes—that's her name—you're not *tired* with all you walk; I do, indeed;' and she only laughs. She has a very pretty laugh too, she has; and Mr. Cleve said to me once—that's two years ago, now—the first year he was spoke of in Cardyllian about her. We did think then there was something to be, and now it is all on again, and the old people—as we may call them—is well pleased it should."

"Yes, but I mean that Miss Etherage has seen nothing of the world—nothing of society, except what is to be met with at Hazelden—isn't that the name of the place?—and in her little excursions into this town. Isn't it so?" said Miss Sheckleton.

"Oh, no!—bless you, no. Miss Agnes Etherage—they pay visits—she and her sister—at all the great houses; a week here, and a fortnight there, round the two counties, this side and the other. She's a great favourite, is Miss Agnes. She can play and sing, dear me, very nice, she can: I have *heard* her. You would *wonder* now, what a bright little thing she is."

"But even so. I don't think that town-bred young men ever care much for country-bred young ladies. Not that they mayn't be a great deal better; but, somehow, they don't suit, I think—they don't get on."

"But, mark you this," said Mrs. Jones. "He always liked her. We always saw he liked her. There's property too—a good estate; and all goes to them two girls; and Miss

Charity, we all know, will never marry; no more will the Admiral—I mean Mr. Etherage himself—with them legs of his; and Mr. Kiffyn—Master Cleve's uncle—spoke to our lawyer here once about it, as if it was a thing he would like—that the Hazelden property should be joined to the Ware estate."

"Joined together in holy wedlock," laughed Miss Sheckleton; but she was not particularly cheerful. And some more intending purchasers coming in and seizing upon the communicative Mrs. Jones, who had only time to whisper "They do say—them that *should* know—that it will be in Spring next; but I'm not to tell; so you'll please remember it's a secret."

"Shall we go, dear?" whispered Miss Sheckleton to her muffled companion, who forthwith rose and accompanied her from the shop, followed by the eyes of Mrs. Jones's new visiters, who were more interested on hearing that "it was Miss Anne Sheckleton and the other Malory lady," and they slipped out to the door-step, and under the awning peeped after the mysterious ladies, until an accidental backward glance from Miss Sheckleton routed them, and the *materfamilias* entered a little hastily but gravely, and with her head high, and her young ladies tittering.

As Cleve Verney walked to and fro beside pretty Agnes Etherage that day, and talked as usual, gaily and fluently, there seemed on a sudden to come a sort of blight over the harvest of his thoughts—both corn and flowers. He repeated the end of his sentence, and forgot what he was going to say; and Miss Charity said, "Well? go on; I want so much to hear the end;" and looking up she thought he looked a little pale.

"Yes, certainly, I'll tell you the end when I can remember it. But I let myself think of something else for a moment, and it has flown away—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Miss Charity, "Just a moment; look there, Aggie; aren't those the Malory ladies?"

"Where?" said Cleve. "Oh! I see. Very like, I think—the old lady, I mean."

"Yes, oh certainly," replied Agnes, "it is the old lady, and I'm nearly certain the young lady also, who *else can* it be? It must be she."

"They are going over the hill to Malory," said Miss Charity. "I don't know what it is about that old lady that I think so *wonderfully* nice, and so perfectly charming, and the young lady is *the* most perfectly—beautiful—person, all to *nothing*, I ever saw in my life. Don't you think so, Mr. Verney?"

"Your sister, I'm sure, is very much obliged," said he, with a glance at Agnes. "But this Malory young lady is so muffled in that great shawl that there is very little indeed to remind one of the young lady we saw in church—"

"What o'clock is that?" interrupted Miss Charity, as the boom of the clock from the church tower sounded over the green.

So it seemed their hour had come, and the little demonstration on the green came to a close, and Cleve that evening walked with the Hazelden ladies only so far as the bridge, there taking his leave with an excuse. He felt uncomfortably somehow. That Margaret Fanshawe should have actually come down to Cardyllian was a singular and almost an unaccountable occurrence.

Cleve Verney had certainly not intended the pantomime which he presented to the window of the Cardyllian reading-room for the eyes that had witnessed it.

Cleve was uncomfortable. It is always unpleasant to have to explain—especially where the exculpation involves a disclosure that is not noble.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE OAK PARLOUR—A MEETING AND PARTING.

"Gossiping place Cardyllian is," said Miss Anne Sheckleton, after they had walked on a little in silence. "What nonsense the people do talk. I never heard anything like it. Did you ever hear such a galamathias?"

The young lady walking by her side answered by a cold little laugh—

"Yes, I suppose so. All small country towns *are*, I believe," said she.

"And that good old soul, Mrs. Jones, she does invent the most absurd gossip about every body that imagination can conceive. Wilmot told me the other day that she had given her to understand that your father is a madman, sent down here by London doctors for change of air. I make it a point never to mind one word she says; although her news, I confess, does amuse me."

"Yes, it is, very foolish. Who are those Etherages?" said Margaret.

"Oh! They are village people—oddities," said Miss Sheckleton. "From all I can gather, you have no idea what absurd people they are."

"He was walking with them. Was not he?" asked the young lady.

"Yes—I think so," answered her cousin.

Then followed a long silence, and the elder lady at length said—

"How fortunate we have been in our weather; haven't we? How beautiful the hills look this evening!" said the spinster; but her words did not sound as if she cared about the hills or the light. I believe the two ladies were acting a part.

"Yes," said Margaret, "so they do."

The girl felt as if she had walked fifty miles instead of two—quite worn out—her limbs aching with a sense of fatigue; it was a trouble to hold her head up. She would have liked to sit down on the old stone bench they were passing now, and to die there like a worn-out prisoner on a march.

Two or three times that evening as they sat unusually silent and listless, Miss Anne Sheckleton peeped over her spectacles, lowering her work for a moment, with a sad inquiry, into her face, and seemed on the point of speaking. But there was nothing inviting to talk, in Margaret's face, and when she spoke there was no reference to the subject on which Miss Sheckleton would have liked to speak.

So, at last tired, with a pale, wandering smile, she kissed the kind old spinster, and bid her good night. When she reached her room, however, she did not undress, but having secured her door, she sat down to her little desk, and wrote a letter; swiftly and resolutely the pen glided over the page. Nothing added—nothing erased; each line remained as she penned it first.

Having placed this letter in its envelope, and addressed it to "Cleve Verney, Esq., Ware," she opened her window. The air was mild; none of the sharpness in it that usually gives to nights at that time of year, a frosty foretaste of winter. So sitting by the window, which, placed in one of the gables of the old house, commands a view of the uplands of Cardyllian, and to the left, of the sea and the misty mountains—she sat there, leaning upon her hand.

Here with the letter on her lap, she sat, pale as a meditating suicide, and looking dreamily over the landscape. It is, at times, some little incident of by-play, or momentary hesitation of countenance, that gives its whole character and force to a situation. Before the retina of Margaret one image was always visible, that of Cleve Verney as she saw him to-day, looking under Agnes Etherage's bonnet, with interest, into her face, as he talked and walked by her side, on the Green of Cardyllian.

Of course there are false prophecies as well as true, in love; illusions as well as inspirations, and fancied intimations may mislead. But Margaret could not doubt here. All the time she smiled and assumed her usual tone and manner, there was an agony at her heart.

Miss Fanshawe would trust no one with her secret. She was not like other girls. Something of the fiery spirit of her southern descent she had inherited. She put on the shawl and veil she had worn that day, unbarred the hall-door, and at two o'clock, when Cardyllian was locked in the deepest slumber, glided through its empty streets, to the little wooden portico, over which that day she had read "Post-office," and placed in it the letter which next morning made quite a little sensation in the Post-office *coterie*.

Under the awful silence and darkness of the old avenue, she reached again the hall-door of Malory. She stood for a moment upon the steps looking seaward—I think toward Ware—pale as a ghost, with one slender hand clenched, and a wild sorrow in her face. She cared very little, I think, whether her excursion were discovered or not. The messenger had flown

from her empty hand; her voice could not recall it, or delay it for an hour—quite irrevocable, and all was over.

She entered the hall, closed and barred the door again, ascended to her room, and lay awake, through the long night, with her hand under her cheek, not stunned, not dreaming, but in a frozen apathy, in which she saw all with a despairing clearness.

Next day Cleve Verney received a note, in a hand which he knew not; but having read—could not mistake—a cold, proud note, with a gentle cruelty, ending all between them, quite decisively, and not deigning a reason for it.

I dare say that Cleve could not himself describe with much precision the feelings with which he read this letter.

Cleve Verney, however, could be as impetuous and as rash too, on occasion, as other people. There was something of rage in his soul which scouted all consequences. Could temerity be imagined more audacious than his.

Right across from Ware to the jetty of Malory ran his yacht, audaciously, in open sea, in broad daylight. There is, in the dower-house, a long low room, wainscoated in black shining panels from floor to ceiling, and which in old times was called the oak parlour. It has two doors, in one of its long sides, the farther opening near the stairs, the other close to the hall door.

Up the avenue, up the steps, into the hall, and, taking chance, into this room, walked Cleve Verney, without encountering interruption or even observation. *Fortuna favet fortibus*, so runs the legend in faded gold letters, under the dim portrait of Sir Thomas Verney, in his armour, fixed in the panel of the hall. So it had proved with his descendant.

Favoured by fortune, without having met a human being, and directed by the same divinity it would seem, he had entered the room I have described; and at the other end, alone, awaiting Miss Sheckleton, who was to accompany her in a little ramble among the woods, stood Miss Fanshawe, dressed for her walk.

In came Cleve pale with agitation; approached her quickly, and stopped short, saying—

"I've come; I'm here to ask—how could you—my God!—how *could* you write the letter you sent this morning?"

Miss Fanshawe was leaning a little against the oak window-frame, and did not change this pose, which was haughty and almost sullen.

"*Why* I wrote that letter, *no* one has a right to ask me, and I shall say no more than is contained in the letter itself." She spoke so coldly and quietly that there seemed almost a sadness in her tones.

"I don't think you can really mean it," said Cleve, "I'm *sure* you can't; you can't *possibly* think that any one could use another so, without a reason."

"*Not* without a reason," said she.

"But I say, surely I have a right to hear it," urged Cleve. "Is it fair to condemn me, as your letter does, unheard, and to punish me, in ignorance?"

"*Not* in ignorance; at this moment, you *know* the reason perfectly," replied the girl, and he felt as if her great hazel eyes lighted up all the dark labyrinths of his brain, and disclosed every secret that lurked there.

Cleve was for a moment embarrassed, and averted his eyes. It was true. He *did* know; he could not fail to guess the cause. He had been cursing his ill luck all the morning, and wondering what malign caprice could have led her, of all times and places, at that moment, to the Green of Cardyllian.

In the "Arabian Nights," that delightful volume which owes nothing to trick or book-craft, and will preserve its charm undimmed through all the imitations of style and schools, which, projecting its images from the lamp and hues of a dazzling fancy, can no more be lectured into neglect than the magic lantern, and will preserve its popularity while the faculty of imagination and the sense of colour remain, we all remember a parallel. In the "Sultan's Purveyor's Story," where the beautiful favourite of Zobside is about to make the bridegroom of her love quite happy, and in the moment of his adoration, starts up transformed with a "lamentable cry," and hate and fury in her aspect, all about that unfortunate "ragout made with garlic," and thereupon, with her own hand and a terrible scourge, lashes him, held down by slaves, into a welter of blood, and

then orders the executioner to strike off, at the wrist, his offending hand.

"Oh, *yes!* you *do* know, self-convicted, *why* I think it better for both that we should part now—better that we should thus early be undeceived; with little pain and less reluctance, forget the precipitation and folly of an hour, and go our several ways through life apart. You are fickle; you are selfish; you are reckless; you are quite unworthy of the love you ask for; if you are trifling with that young lady, Miss Etherage, how cruel and unmanly; and if *not*, by what right do you presume to stand here?"

Could he ever forget that beautiful girl as he saw her before him there, almost terrible — her eyes — the strange white light that seemed to flicker on her forehead—her attitude, Italian more than English, statuesque and wild?

On a sudden came another change, sad as a broken-hearted death and farewell—the low tone—the fond lingering—of an unspeakable sorrow, and eternal leave-taking.

"In either case my resolution is taken. I have said, *Farewell;* and I will see you no more—no more—never."

And as she spoke, she left the room by the door that was beside her.

It was a new sensation for Cleve Verney to feel as he did at that moment. A few steps he followed toward the door, and then hesitated. Then with a new impulse, he did follow and open it. But she was gone. Even the sound of her step was lost.

He turned back, and paused for a minute to collect his thoughts. Of course this must not be. The idea of giving her up so, was simple nonsense, and not to be listened to.

The door at which the young lady had left the room but two or three minutes before, now opened, and Miss Sheckleton's natty figure and kind old face came in. Quite aghast she looked at him.

"For God's sake, Mr. Verney, why are you here? How *can* you be so rash?" she almost gasped. "You *must* go, *instantly*."

"How could you advise the cruelty and folly of that letter?" he said, impetuously.

"What letter?"

"Oh! Miss Sheckleton, do let us be frank; only say what have I done or said, or thought, that I should be condemned and discarded without a hearing?"

Hereupon Miss Sheckleton still urging his departure in frightened whispers, protested her innocence of his meaning, and at last bethought her of persuading him, to leave the house, and meet her for the purpose of explaining all, of which he soon perceived she was honestly ignorant, in their accustomed trysting place.

There, accordingly, among the old trees, they met, and discussed, and she blamed and pitied him; and promised, with such caution as old ladies use in speaking for the resolves of the young of their own sex, that Margaret should learn the truth from her, although she could not of course say what she might think of it, taking as she did such decided, and, sometimes, strange views of things.

So they parted kindly. But Cleve's heart was disquieted within him, and his sky this evening was wild and stormy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JUDÆUS APELLA.

On the stillest summer day did you ever see nature quite still, even that circumscribed nature that hems you round with densest trees, as you lounge on your rustic seat, in lazy contemplation, amid the shorn grass of your flower beds, and which are all oppressed and stifled with heat and slumber? Look attentively, and you will see a little quiver like a dying pulse, in the hanging flower-bells, and a light faint tremble in this leaf and that. Of nature, which is, being interpreted, life, the law is motion, and this law controls the moral as well as the physical world. Thus it is that there is nowhere any such thing as absolute repose, and everywhere we find change and action.

Over Malory, if anywhere, broods the spirit of repose. Buried in deep

forest — fenced on one side by the lonely estuary—no town or village lying beyond it; sea-ward the little old-world roads that pass by it are quite forsaken by traffic. Even the sound of children's laughter and prattle are never heard there, and little but the solemn caw of the rooks and the baying of the night dog. Yet chance was then invading that quiet seclusion with an unexpected danger.

A gentleman driving that day to the "George Inn" at Cardyllian, from a distant station on the Great London line, and having picked up from his driver, a Cardyllian man, all he could about Malory, and an old Mrs. Mervyn who lived there, stopped suddenly at the corner of the old road, which, two miles below Cardyllian, turns off inland, and rambles with many pleasant windings into the road that leads to Penruthyn Priory.

This gentleman, whose dress was in the cheap and striking style, and whose jewellery was conspicuous, was high-shouldered, with a very decided curve, though not exactly a hunch. He was small, with rather long arms. His hair, whiskers, and beard were glossy black, and his features Jewish. He switched and twirled a black walking-cane, with silver knobs on it, in his hand, and he had two or three rings on his fingers.

His luggage had gone on to the "George," and whenever opportunity occured along that solitary road he renewed his inquiries about Malory, with a slight peculiarity of accent which the unsophisticated rustics in that part of the world had never heard before.

By this time it was evening, and in the light of the approaching sunset, he might now, as the view of the sea and the distant mountains opened, have enjoyed a pleasure for which, however, he had no taste; these evening glows and tints were to him but imperfect light, and he looked along the solemn and shadowy hills as he would have run his eye along the shops in Cheapside—if with any interest, simply to amuse himself with a calculation of what they might be worth in money.

He was now passing the pretty church-yard of Llanderris. The gray head-stones and grass-grown graves brought home to him no passing thought of change and mortality; death was to him an arithmetical formula by which he measured annuities and reversions and policies. And now he had entered the steep pretty road that leads down with an irregular curve to Malory.

He looked down upon the grand old wood. He had a smattering of the value of timber, and remembered what a hit Rosenthal and Solomons had made of their purchase of the wood at East Milton, when the railway was about to be made there; and what a nice bit of money they had made of their contract for sleepers and all sorts of other things. Could not Jos Larkin, or some better man, be found to get up a little branch line from Lluinan to Cardyllian? His large mouth almost watered as he thought of it; and how that eight or nine miles of rail would devour every inch of timber that grew there — not a branch would be lost.

But now he was descending toward Malory, and the banks at the right hand and the left shut out the view. So he began to descend the slope at his leisure, looking up and about him and down at the worn road for material for thought, for his mind was bustling and barren.

The road is not four steps across. It winds steeply between high banks. Over these stoop, and cross, and mingle in the perspective, the gray stems of tall ash trees mantled in ivy, which here and there has climbed among the boughs, and made a darker umbrage among the clear green foliage of the trees. Beneath, ascending the steep banks, grow clumps of nettles, elder, hazel, and thorn. Only down the slope of the road can the passenger see anything of the country it traverses, for the banks out-top him on either side. The rains have washed its stones so bare, wearing a sort of gulley in the centre, as to give it the character in some sort of a forest ravine.

The sallow, hatchet-faced man, with prominent black eyes, was walking up this steep and secluded road. Those sharp eyes of his were busy. A wild bee hummed over his head, and he cut at it pleasantly with his stick, but it was out of reach, and he paused

and eyed its unconscious flight, with an ugly smile, as if he owed it a grudge for having foiled him. There was little life in that secluded and dark track. He spied a small dome-shaped black beetle stumbling through the dust and pebbles, across it.

The little man drew near and peered at it with his piercing eyes and a pleasant grin. He stooped. The point of his pale nose was right over it. Across the desert the beetle was toiling. His path was a right line. The little man looked across to see what he was aiming at, or where was his home. There was nothing particular that he could perceive in the grass and weeds at the point whitherward he was tending in a right line. The beetle sprawled and stumbled over a little bead of clay, recovered his feet and his direction, and plodded on in a straight line. The little man put his stick, point downward, before him. The beetle rounded it carefully, and plodded on inflexibly in the same direction. Then he of the black eyes and long nose knocked him gently in the face, and again, and again, jerking him this way or that. Still, like a prize-fighter he rallied between the rounds, and drove right on in his old line. Then the little man gave him a sharper knock, which sent him a couple of feet away, on his back; right and left sprawled and groped the short legs of the beetle, but alas! in vain. He could not right himself. He tried to lurch himself over, but in vain. Now and then came a frantic gallop with his little feet; it was beating the air. This was pleasant to the man with the piercing eyes, who stooped over, smiling with his wide mouth, and showing his white fangs. I wonder what the beetle thought of his luck—what he thought of it all. The paroxysms of hope, when his feet worked so hard, grew shorter. The intervals of despair and inaction grew longer. The beetle was making up his mind that he must lie on his back and die slowly, or be crushed under a hoof, or picked up and swallowed by a wandering farm-yard fowl.

Though it was pleasant to witness his despair, the man with the prominent eyes tired of the sight, he gave him a poke under the back, and tumbled him up again on his feet, and watched him. The beetle seemed a little bothered for a while, and would have shaken himself I'm sure if he could. But he soon came to himself, turned in his old direction, and, as it seemed to the observer, marched stumbling on with indomitable perseverance toward the selfsame point. I know nothing of beetle habits. I can make no guess why he sought that particular spot. Was it merely a favourite haunt, or were there a little beetle brood, and a wife awaiting him there? A strong instinct of some sort urged him, and a most heroic perseverance.

And now I suppose he thought his troubles over, and that his journey was about surely to be accomplished. Alas! it will never be accomplished. There is an influence near which you suspect not. The distance is lessening, the green grass, and dock leaves, and mallows, very near. Alas! there is no sympathy with your instinct, with the purpose of your life, with your labours and hopes. An inverted sympathy is *there;* a sympathy with the difficulty—with "the Adversary"—with death. The little man with the sharp black eyes brought the point of his stick near the beetle's back, having seen enough of his pilgrimage, and squelched him.

The pleasure of malice is curious. There are people who flavour their meals with their revenges, whose future is made interesting by the hope that this or that person may come under their heel. Which is pleasantest, building castles in the air for ourselves, or dungeons in pandemonium for our enemies? It is well for one half of the human race that the other has not the disposal of them. More rare, more grotesque, more exquisitely fiendish, is that sport with the mysteries of agony, that lust of torture, that constitute the desire and the fruition of some monstrous souls.

Now, having ended that beetle's brief life in eternal darkness, and reduced all his thoughts and yearnings to cypher, and dissolved his persevering and resolute little character, never to be recombined, this young gentleman looked up among the yellow leaves in which the birds were chirping their evening gossip, and treated them to a capital imitation of a wild cat, followed by a still happier one of a screech-owl, which set all the sparrows in the ivy round twittering in

panic; and having sufficiently amused himself, the sun being now near the horizon, he bethought him of his mission to Malory. So on he marched whistling an air from an opera, which, I am bound to admit, he did with the brilliancy and precision of a little flagiolet, in so much that it amounted to quite a curiously pretty accomplishment, and you would have wondered how a gentleman with so unmistakable a vein of the miscreant in him, could make such sweet and bird-like music.

A little boy riding a tired donkey into Cardyllian, pointed out to him the gate of the old place, and with a jaunty step, twirling his cane, and whistling as he went, he reached the open space before the door steps.

The surly servant who happened to see him as he hesitated and gaped at the windows, came forth, and challenged him with tones and looks the reverse of hospitable.

"Oh! Mrs. Mervyn?" said he; "well, she doesn't live here. Get ye round that corner there, and you'll see the steward's house with a hatch-door to it, and you may ring the bell, and leave, d'ye mind, by the back way. You can follow the road by the rere o' the house."

So saying, he warned him off peremptorily with a flunkey's contempt for a mock gentleman, and the sallow man with the black eyes and beard, not at all put out by that slight treatment, for he had seen all sorts of adventures, and had learned unaffectedly to despise contempt, walked listlessly round the corner of the old house, with a somewhat knock-kneed and ungainly stride, on which our bandy friend sneered gruffly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. LEVI VISITS MRS. MERVYN.

And now the stranger stood before the steward's house, which is an old stone building, just two stories high, with but few rooms, and heavy stone shafts to the windows, with little diamond lattices in them, all stained and gray with age—antiquaries assign it to the period of Henry VII.—and when the Jewish gentleman, his wide, loose mouth smiling in solitary expectation, slapped and rattled his cane upon the planks of the hatch, as people in old times called "house!" to summon the servants, he was violating the monastic silence of a building as old as the by-gone friars, with their matin bells and solemn chants.

A little Welsh girl looked over the clumsy bannister, and ran up with his message to Mrs. Mervyn.

"Will you please come upstairs, sir, to the drawing-room?" asked the child.

He was amused at the notion of a "drawing-room" in such a place, and with a lazy sneer climbed the stairs after her.

This drawing-room was very dark at this hour, except for the patch of red light that came through the lattice and rested on the old cupboard opposite, on which stood, shelf above shelf, a grove of coloured delft candlesticks, tea-cups, jugs, men, women, tea-pots, and beasts, all in an old-world style, a decoration which prevails in humble Welsh chambers, and which here was a property of the house, forgotten, I presume, by the great house of Verney, and transmitted from tenant to tenant, with the lumbering furniture.

The flighty old lady, Mrs. Mervyn of the large eyes, received him with an old-fashioned politeness and formality which did not in the least embarrass her visiter, who sate himself down, smiling his moist, lazy smile, with his knees protruded under the table, on which his elbows rested, and with his heels on the rung of his chair, while his hat and cane lay glimmering in the sunlight beside him.

"The maid, I think, forgot to mention your name, sir?" said the old lady gently, but in a tone of inquiry.

"Very like, ma'am—very like, indeed—because, I think, I forgot to mention my name to her," he drawled pleasantly. "I've taken a deal of trouble—I have—to find you out, ma'am, and two hundred and twenty-five miles here, ma'am, and the same back again—a journey of four hundred and fifty miles—is not just no-

thing. I'm glad to see you, ma'am—happy to find you in your drawing-room, ma'am—hope you find yourself as well, ma'am, as your numerous friends could wish you. My name, ma'am, is Levi, being junior governor of the firm of Goldshed and Levi, well known on 'Change, ma'am, and justly appreciated by a large circle of friends, as you may read upon this card."

The card which he tendered did not, it must be allowed, speak of these admiring friends, but simply announced that "Goldshed and Levi" were "Stockbrokers," pursuing their calling at "Offices—10, Scroop-street, Gimmel-lane," in the City. And having held this card before her eyes for a sufficient time, he put it into his pocket.

"You see, ma'am, I've come all this way for our house, to ask you whether you would like to hear some news of your governor, ma'am?"

"Of whom, sir?" inquired the tall old lady, who had remained standing all this time, as she had received him, and was now looking at him with eyes, not of suspicion, but of undisguised fear.

"Of your husband, ma'am, I mean," drawled he, eyeing her with his cunning smile.

"You don't mean, sir——" said she faintly, and thereupon she was seized with a trembling, and sat down, and her very lips turned white, and Mr. Levi began to think "the old girl was looking uncommon queerish," and did not like the idea of "its happening," under these circumstances.

"There, ma'am—don't take on! Where's the water? Da-a-a-mn the drop!" he exclaimed, turning up mugs and jugs in a flurry. "I say—Mary Anne—Jane—chick-a-biddy—girl—be alive there, will ye?" howled the visiter over the bannister. "Water, can't ye? Old woman's sick!"

"Better now, sir—better—just open that—a little air, please," the old lady whispered.

With some hurried fumbling he succeeded in getting the lattice open.

"Water, will you? What a time you're about it, da-a-am little beast!" he bawled in the face of the child.

"Much better, thanks—very much better," whispered the old lady.

"Of course, you're better, ma'am. Here it is at la-a-ast. Have some water, ma'am? Do. Give her the water, you little fool."

She sipped a little.

"Coming round—all right," he said tenderly. "What cattle them old women are! da-a-am them." A little pause followed.

"A deal better now, ma'am?"

"I'm startled, sir."

"Of course, you're startled, ma'am."

"And faint, sir."

"Why not, ma'am?"

Mrs. Rebecca Mervyn breathed three or four great sighs, and began to look again like a living woman.

"Now she looks quite nice," (he pronounced it ni-i-ishe) doesn't she? You may make tracksh, young woman; go, will you?"

"I feel so much better," said the old lady when they were alone.

"You do—quite—ever so much better. Shall I go on?"

"Pray do, sir."

"Well now, see, if I do, there must be no more of that, old lady. If you can't talk of the governor, we'll just let him alone," said Levi sturdily.

"For God's sake, sir, if you mean my husband, tell me all you know."

"All aint a great deal, ma'am; but a cove has turned up as knew him well."

"Some one who knew him?"

"Just so, ma'am." He balanced whether he should tell her that he was dead or not, but decided that it would be more convenient, though less tragic, to avoid getting up a new scene like the other, so he modified his narrative. "He's turned up, ma'am, and knew him very intimate; and has got a meogny" (he so pronounced mahogany) "desk of his, gave in charge to him, since he could not come home at present, containing a law paper, ma'am, making over to his son and yours some property in England."

"Then, he is not coming?" said she.

"Not azh I knowzh, ma'am."

"He has been a long time away," she continued.

"So I'm informed, ma'am," he observed.

"I'll tell you how it was, and when he went away."

"Thank ye, ma'am," he interposed, "I've heard—melancholy case, ma'am; got seven penn'orth, didn't he, and never turned up again?"

"Seven what, sir?"

"Seven years, ma'am; seven penn'orth we call it, ma'am, familiar-like."

"I dont understand you, sir—I don't know what it means; I saw him sail away. It went off, off, off."

"I'll bet a pound it did, ma'am," said Mr. Levi.

"Only to be for a very short time; the sail—I could see it very far—how pretty they look on the sea; but very lonely, I think—too lonely."

"A touch of solitary, ma'am," acquiesced Levi.

"Away, in the yacht," she dreamed on.

"The royal yacht, ma'am, no doubt."

"The yacht, we called it. He said he would return next day; and it went round Pendyllion—round the headland of Pendyllion, I lost it, and it never came again; but I think it will, sir—don't you? I'm sure it will—he was so confident; only smiled and nodded, and he said, 'No, I won't say good-by.' He would not have said that if he did not mean to return—he could not so deceive a lonely poor thing like me, that adored him."

"No, he couldn't, ma'am, not he; no man could. Betray the girl that adored him! Ba-a-ah! impossible," replied Mr. Levi, and shook his glossy ringlets sleepily, and dropped his eyelids, smiling. This old girl amused him, her romance was such a joke. But the light was perceptibly growing more dusky, and business must not wait upon fun, so Mr. Levi said—

"He'sh no shicken by this time, ma'am—your son, ma'am; I'm told he'sh twenty-sheven yearsh old—thatsh no shicken—twenty-sheven next birth-day."

"Do you know anything of him, sir? Oh, no, he doesn't," she said, looking dreamily with her great sad eyes upon him.

"Jest you tell me, ma'am, where was he baptized, and by what name?" said her visiter.

A look of doubt and fear came slowly and wildly into her face as she looked at him.

"Who is he—I've been speaking to you, sir?"

"Oh! yesh, mo-o-ost *beautiful*, you 'av, ma'am," answered he; "and I am your son's best friend—and yours, ma'am; only you tell me where to find him, and he'sh a made man, for all hizh dayzh."

"Where has he come from?—a stranger," she murmured.

"I *told* you, ma'am."

"I don't know you, sir; I don't know your name," she dreamed on.

"Benjamin Levi. I'll *spell* it for you, if you like," he answered, beginning to grow testy. "I told you my name, and showed you my ca-a-ard. Bah! it ravels at one end, as fast as it knits at the other."

And again, he held the card of the firm of Goldshed and Levi, with his elbows on the table, between the fingers of his right and left hand, bowed out like an old-fashioned shop-board, and looking as if it would spring out elastically into her face.

"*There*, ma'am, that'sh the ticket!" said he, eyeing her over it.

"Once, sir, I spoke of business to a stranger, and I was always sorry; I did mischief," said the old woman, with a vague remorsefulness.

"I'm *no* stranger, ma'am, begging your pardon," he replied, insolently; "you don't half know what you're saying, I do think. Goldshed and Levi—not know us; sich precious rot, I *never!*"

"I did mischief, sir."

"I only want to know where to find your son, ma'am, if you know, and if you won't tell, you *ruin* that poor young man. It ain't a pound to me, but it'sh a deal to him," answered the good-natured Mr. Levi.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but I once did mischief by speaking to a gentleman whom I didn't know. Lady Verney made me promise, and I'm sure she was right, never to speak about business without first consulting some member of her family. I don't understand business—never did," pleaded she.

"Well, here's a go! not understaan'? Why, there's *nothing* to understaan'. It isn't business. S-O-N," he spelt "*son*. H-U-S-B-A-N-D—*uzbaan'*—that ain't business—da-a-am me! *Where's* the business? Baah!"

"Sir," said the old lady, drawing herself up, "I've answered you. It was about my husband—God help me—I spoke before, and did mischief without knowing it. I won't speak of him to strangers, except as Lady

Verney advises—to any stranger—especially to you, sir."

There was a sound of steps outside, which, perhaps, modified the answer of Mr. Levi. He was very much chagrined, and his great black eyes looked very wickedly upon her helpless face.

"Ha, ha, ha! as you please, ma'am. It isn't the turn of a shilling to *me*, but you *ru*-in the *poo-or* young man, your son, for da-a-am me, if I touch his bushinesh again, if it falls through *now*; mind you *that*. So, having *ruined* your own flesh and blood, you tell me to go as I came. It's *nauthing* to me—mind that—but ru-in to him; here's my hat and stick—I'm going, only just I'll give you one chance more for that poor young man, just a minute to think again." He had stood up, with his hat and cane in his hand. "Just one chance—you'll be sending for me again, and I won't come. No—no—never, da-a-am me!"

"Good evening, sir," said the lady.

Mr. Levi bit his thumb-nail.

"You don't know what you're doing, ma'am," said he, trying once more.

"I can't, sir—I *can't*," she said, distractedly.

"Come, think—I'm going—*going*; just think—what do you shay?"

He waited.

"I won't speak, sir."

"You won't?"

"No, sir."

He lingered for a moment, and the red sunlight showed like a flush of anger on his sallow face. Then, with an insolent laugh, he turned, sticking his hat on his head, and walked down the stairs, singing.

Outside the hatch, he paused for a second.

"I'll get it all another way," he thought. "Round here," he said, "wasn't it—the back way. Good evening, you stupid, old, da-a-am, crazy cat," and he saluted the windows of the steward's house with a vicious twitch of his cane.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. BENJAMIN LEVI RECOGNISES AN ACQUAINTANCE.

Mr. Benjamin Levi, having turned the corner of the steward's house, found himself before two great piers, passing through the gate of which he entered the stable yard, at the further side of which was a second gate, which he rightly conjectured would give him access to that back avenue through which he meant to make his exit.

He glanced round this great quadrangle, one end of which was overlooked by the rere of the old house, and that quaint old refectory with its clumsy flight of stone steps, from the windows of which our friend Sedley had observed the ladies of Malory while engaged in their garden work.

There was grass growing between the paving stones, and moss upon the walls, and the stable doors were decaying upon their rusty hinges. Commenting, as so practical a genius naturally would, upon the surrounding capabilities and decay, Mr. Levi had nearly traversed this solitude when he heard some one call, "Thomas Jones!" twice or thrice, and the tones of the voice arrested him instantly.

He was a man with a turn for musical business, and not only dabbled in concerts and little operatic speculations, but, having a naturally musical ear, had a retentive memory for voices—and this blind man's faculty stood him in stead here, for, with a malicious thrill of wonder and delight, he instantly recognised this voice.

The door of that smaller yard which is next the house opened now, and Sir Booth Fanshawe entered, bawling with increased impatience—"Thomas Jones!"

Sir Booth's eye lighted on the figure of Mr. Levi, as he stood close by the wall at the other side, hoping to escape observation.

With the same instinct Sir Booth stept backward hastily into an open stable door, and Mr. Levi skipt into another door, within which, unfortunately, a chained dog, Neptune, was dozing.

The dog flew the length of his

tether at Mr. Levi's legs, and the Jewish gentleman sprang forth more hastily even than he had entered.

At the same moment, Sir Booth's pride determined *his* vacillation, and he strode boldly forward and said—

"I think I know you, sir; don't I?"

As there was still some little distance between them, Mr. Levi affected near-sightedness, and, compressing his eyelids, smiled dubiously, and said—

"Rayther think not, sir. No, sir—I'm a stranger; my name is Levi—of Goldshed and Levi—and I've been to see Mrs. Mervyn, who lives here, about her young man. I don't know you, sir—no—it is a mishtake."

"No, Mr. Levi—you *do* know me—by —— you do," replied Sir Booth, approaching, while his fingers clutched at his walking-stick with an uneasy gripe, as if he would have liked to exercise it upon the shoulders of the Israelite.

"Oh! crikey! Ay, to be sure—why, it's Sir Booth Fanshawe! I beg pardon, Sir Booth. We thought you were in France; but no matter, Sir Booth Fanshawe, none in the world, for all that little bushiness is blown over, quite. We have no interest—no more than your horse—in them little securities, by ——; we sold them two months ago to Sholomons; we were glad to sell them to Sholomons, daam him; he hit us hard with some of Wilbraham and Cumming's paper, and I don't care, by ——, if he never sees a shilling of it—we would rather *like* it." And Mr. Levi again made oath to that confession of feeling.

"Will you come into the house and have a glass of sherry or something?" said Sir Booth, on reflection.

"Well, I don't mind," said Mr. Levi.

And in he went and had a glass of sherry and a biscuit, and grew friendly and confidential.

"Don't you be running up to town, Sir Booth—Sholomons is looking for you. Clever man, Sholomons, and you should get quietly out of this country as soon as you conveniently can. He thinks you're in France now. He sent Rogers—you know Rogers?"

He paused so long here that Sir Booth had to answer "No."

"Well, he sent him—a good man, Rogers, you know, but drinks a bit—after you to Vichy, ha, ha, ha! By ——, it was rich. Daam Sholomons. It was worth a pound to see his face—ugly fellow. You know Sholomons?"

And so Mr. Levi entertained his host, who neither loved nor trusted him, and at his departure gave him all sorts of friendly warnings and sly hints, and walked and ran partly to the "George," and got a two-horse vehicle as quickly as they could harness the horses, and drove at great speed to Lluinan, where he telegraphed to his partner to send a writ down by next train for Sir Booth, the message being from Benjamin Levi, George Inn, Cardyllian, to Goldshed & Levi, &c., &c., London.

Mr. Levi took his ease in his inn, sipped a good deal of brandy and water, and smoked many cigars, with a serene mind and pleasant anticipations, for, if nothing went wrong, the telegram would be in his partner's hand in ample time to enable him, with his accustomed diligence, to send down a "beak" with the necessary documents by the night train, who would reach Cardyllian early, and pay his little visit at Malory by nine o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Levi, as prosperous gentlemen will, felt his solitude, though luxurious, too dull for the effervescence of his spirits, and having questioned his host as to the amusements of Cardyllian, found that its normal resources of that nature were confined to the billiard and reading rooms, where, on payment of a trifling benefaction to the institution, he enjoyed, as a "visitor," the exhilarating privileges of a member of the Club.

In the billiard-room, accordingly, that night, was the fragrance of Mr. Levi's cheroot agreeably perceptible, the sonorous drawl of his peculiar accent vocal amongst pleasanter intonations, and his "cuts," "double doubles," and "long crosses," painfully admired by the gentlemen whose shillings he pocketed at pool. And it was pleasant to his exquisitely commercial genius to think that the contributions of the gentlemen to whom he had "given a lesson," and whose "eyes he had opened," would constitute a fund sufficient to pay his expenses at the "George," and even to leave something towards his return fare to London.

The invalid who was suffering from asthma in the bedroom next his was

disturbed by his ejaculations as he undressed, and by his repeated bursts of laughter, and rang his bell and implored the servant to beg of the gentlemen who were conversing in the next room to make a little less noise, in consideration of his indisposition.

The manner in which he had "potted" the gentlemen in the billiard-room, right and left, and the uncomfortable admiration of his successes exhibited in their innocent countenances, had, no doubt, something to do with these explosions of merriment. But the chief source of his amusement was the anticipated surprise of Sir Booth, when the little domiciliary visit of the next morning should take place, and the recollection of his own adroitness in mystifying the Baronet.

So he fell into a sweet slumber, uncrossed by even an ominous dream, not knowing that the shrewd old bird for whom his chaff was spread and his pot simmering had already flown with the scream of the whistle on the wings of the night train to Chester, and from that centre to an unknown nook, whence, in a day or two more, he had flitted to some continental roost, which even clever Mr. Levi could not guess.

Next morning early, the ladies were on their way to London, through which they were to continue their journey, and to join Sir Booth abroad.

Two persons were, therefore, very much disappointed next day at Malory; but it could not be helped. One was Cleve Verney, who tried the inexorable secrecy of the servant in every way, but in vain; possibly because the servant did not himself know where "the family" were gone. The other was Mr. Benjamin Levi, who resented Sir Booth's selfish duplicity with an exasperation which would hardly have been appeased by burning that "daam' old mizzled bankrupt robber" alive.

Mr. Levi flew to Chester with his "beak" in a third-class carriage, and thence radiated telegraphic orders and entreaties affecting Sir Booth wherever he had a friend, and ready, on a hint by the wires, to unleash his bailiff on his track, and fix him on the soil, immovable as the petrified witch of Mucklestane Muir, by the spell of his parchment legend.

But no gleam of light rewarded his labours. It was enough to ruffle even Mr. Levi's temper, which, accordingly, *was* ruffled. To have been so near! To have had his hand, as it were, upon the bird. If he had only had the writ himself in his pocket he might have dropped, with his own fingers, that grain of salt upon his tail. But it was not to be. At the moment of possession, Mr. Levi was balked. He could grind curses under his white teeth, and did not spare them now. Some of them were, I daresay, worthy of that agile witch, "Cuttie Sark," as she stood baffled on the key-stone of the bridge, with Meggie's severed tail in her quivering gripe.

In the meantime, for Cleve Verney, Malory is stricken with a sudden blight. Its woods are enchanted no longer; it is dark, now, and empty. His heart aches when he looks at it.

He missed his accustomed walk with the Etherage girls. He wrote to tell old Vane Etherage that he was suffering from a severe cold, and could not dine with him, as he had promised. The cold was a lie—but was he really well? Are the spirits no part of health; and where were his?

About a fortnight later, came a letter from his good friend, Miss Sheckleton. How delightfully interesting, though it contained next to nothing. But how interesting! How often he read it through! How every solitary moment was improved by a glance into it!

It was a foreign letter. It would be posted, she said, by a friend in Paris. She could not yet tell, even to a friend so kind as he, the address which would find them. She hoped, however, *very* soon to be at liberty to do so. *All* were well. Her young friend had never alluded since to the subject of the last painful interview. *She*, Miss Sheckleton, could not, unless a favourable opening presented, well invite a conversation on the matter. She had no doubt, however, that an opportunity would occur. She understood the peculiar character of her beautiful young cousin, and saw a difficulty, and even danger, in pressing the question upon her, possibly pre-

maturely. When he, Cleve, wrote—which she supposed he would so soon as he was in possession of her address—he could state exactly what he wished her to say. Meanwhile, although as she had before hinted, dear Margaret was admired and *sought* by a man both of rank and fortune, with very great constancy, (she thought it not improbable that Cleve had already suspected that affair,) there was in *her* opinion nothing to apprehend, at least at present, in that gentleman's suit—flattered, of course, she must be by a constancy so devoted; but she hardly thought there was a chance that the feeling would grow to anything beyond *that*. So she bid God bless him, and wrote Anne Sheckleton at the foot of the page.

The physician who, mistaking a complaint, administers precisely the concoction which debilitates the failing organ, or inflames the tortured nerve, commits just such an innocent cruelty as good Miss Sheckleton practised, at the close of her letter, upon Cleve Verney.

She had fancied that he knew something of the suit to which she referred for the purpose of relieving an anxiety to which her thoughtful allusion introduced him, in fact, for the first time.

Who was this faithful swain? He knew enough of Sir Booth Fanshawe's surroundings, his friends and intimates, to count up four, or five, or six possible rivals. He knew what perseverance might accomplish, and absence might undo, and his heart was disquieted within him.

If he had consulted his instinct, he would have left Ware forthwith, and pursued to the Continent, and searched every town in France; but he could not act quite according to impulse. He had told the Cardyllian people that he was not to leave Ware till the fourteenth; would no remark attend his sudden departure, following immediately upon the mysterious flitting of the Malory people? He knew what wonderful stories might thereupon arise in Cardyllian, and how sure they would be, one way or another, to reach his uncle Kiffyn, and how that statesman's suspicions might embarrass him. Then a letter might easily reach Ware while he was away, and be lost, or worse.

So he resolved to see out the rest of his time where he was. In Cardyllian church, how dark and cold looked the cavity of the Malory pew! The saints and martyrs in the great eastern window were subdued, and would not glow, and their glories did not burn, but only smouldered that day. And oh! how long was Doctor Splayfoot's sermon! And how vague was his apprehension of the "yarn" to which Miss Charity Etherage treated him all the way from the church porch to the top of Castle-street.

He was glad when the fifteenth, which was to call him away from Ware, approached. He was glad to leave this changed place, glad to go to London—*anywhere*.

Just as all was ready for his flight by the night train, on the evening of the 14th, to his great joy, came a letter, a note, almost, so short, from kind Anne Sheckleton.

All—underlined—were well. There was nothing more, in fact, but one satisfactory revelation, which was the address which would now find them.

So Cleve Verney made the journey to London that night in better spirits.

THE TENANTS OF MALORY.

BY J. S. LE FANU, AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXX.

A COUNCIL OF THREE.

Messrs. Goldshed and Levi have a neat office in Leadenhall-street. As stockbrokers, strictly, they don't, I am told, do anything like so large a business as many of their brethren. Those brethren, for the most part, are not proud of them. Their business is of a somewhat contraband sort. They have been examined once or twice uncomfortably before Parliamentary Committees. They have been savagely handled by the great Mr. Hackle, the Parliamentary counsel. In the great insurance case of "The executors of Shakerly *v.* The Philanthropic Union Company," they were hideously mangled and eviscerated by Sergeant Bilhooke, whose powers are well known. They have been called "harpies," "ghouls," "Madagascar bats," "vermin," "wolves," and "mousing owls," and are nothing the worse of it. Some people think, on the contrary, rather the better, as it has helped to advertise them in their particular line, which is in a puffing, rigging, fishy, speculative, "queerish" business, at which moral stockbrokers turn up their eyes and noses, to the amusement of Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, who have—although the sober office in Leadenhall-street looks sometimes a little neglected—no end of valuable clients, of the particular kind whom they covet, and who frequent the other office, in Wormwood-court, which looks so dirty, mean, and neglected, and yet is the real seat of power.

The "office" in Wormwood-court is an old-fashioned, narrow-fronted, dingy house. It stands apart, and keeps its own secrets, having an uninhabited warehouse at one side, and a shabby timber yard at the other. In front is a flagged court-yard, with dingy grass sprouting here and there, and lines of slimy moss, grimed with soot.

The gate is, I believe, never opened —I don't know that its hinges would work now. If you have private business with the firm on a wet day, you must jump out of your cab in the street, and run up through the side door, through the rain, over the puddled flags, and by the famous log of mahogany which the Messrs. Goldshed and Levi and their predecessors have sold, in bill transactions, nearly six thousand distinct times, without ever losing sight of it.

In the street this day there stood a cab, at that door. Mr. Jos Larkin, the Gylingden attorney, was in consultation with the firm. They were sitting in "the office," the front room which you enter at your right from the hall. A high, old-fashioned chimney-piece cuts off the far angle of the room, obliquely. It is wainscoted in wood, in tiny square panels, except over the fireplace, where one great panel runs across, and up to the ceiling, with somebody's coat of arms carved in relief upon it. This woodwork has been painted white, long ago, but the tint has degenerated to a cream or buff colour, and a good washing would do it no harm. You can see the original oak where the hat-rack was removed, near the window, as also in those places where gentlemen have cut their names or initials.

The window is covered with dust and dirt, beaten by the rain into all sorts of patterns. A chastened light enters through this screen, and you can't see from without who is in the room.

People wonder why Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, with so well-appointed an office in Leadenhall-street, will keep this private office in so beggarly a state; without a carpet, only a strip of nearly-obliterated oilcloth on its dirty floor. Along the centre of the room extends a great old, battered, oblong mahogany quadrangle, full of drawers, with dingy brass handles, and having midway a sort of archway, like a bridge under a railway embankment, covered with oilcloth of an undistinguishable pattern, blotched with old stains of red ink and black, and dribblings of sealing-wax, curling up here and there dustily, where office-knives, in fiddling fingers, had scarred its skin. On top of this are two clumsy desks. Behind one sits the junior partner, on a high wooden stool, and behind the other, the senior, on a battered office chair, with one of its haircloth angles protruding, like the corner of a cocked hat, in front, dividing the short, thick legs of Mr. Goldshed, whose heels were planted on the rungs, bending his clumsy knees, and reminding one of the attitude in which an indifferent rider tries to keep his seat on a restive horse.

Goldshed is the senior in every sense. He is bald, he is fat, he is short. He has gems on his stumpy fingers, and golden chains, in loops and curves, cross the old black velvet waistcoat, which is always wrinkled upward by the habit he has of thrusting his broad, short hands into his trousers pockets.

At the other side, leaning back in his chair, and offering, he flatters himself, a distinguished contrast to the vulgar persons opposite, sat Mr. Jos Larkin, of the Lodge, Gylingden. His tall, bald head was thrown a little back; one arm, in its glossy black sleeve, hung over the back of his chair, with his large red knuckles near the floor. His pink eyes wore their meek and dove-like expression; his mouth a little open, in repose; an air of resignation and beatitude, which, together with his well-known elegance, his long, lavender-tinted trousers, and ribbed silk waistcoat of the same favourite hue, presented a very perfect picture, in this vulgar Jewish setting, of a perfect Christian gentleman.

"If everything favours, Mr. Goldshed, Mr. Dingwell may be in town to-morrow evening. He sends for me immediately on his arrival, to my quarters, you understand, and I will send him on to you, and you to Mrs. Sarah Rumble's lodgings."

"*Mish* Rumble," drawled Goldshed; "not married—a *girl*, *Mish*."

"Yes, *Mrs.* Rumble," continued Larkin, gently, "there's no harm in saying Mrs.; many ladies in a position of responsibility, prefer that style to *Miss*, for obvious reasons."

Here Goldshed, who was smiling lazily, winked at his junior, who returned that signal in safety, for Mr. Larkin, whose countenance was raised toward the ceiling, had closed his eyes. The chaste attorney's discretion amused them, for Miss Sarah Rumble was an industrious, careworn girl of two-and-fifty, taciturn, and with a brown pug face, and tresses somewhat silvery.

"We are told by the apostle," continued Mr. Larkin, musingly, "not only to avoid evil, but the appearance of evil. I forgot, however, our religions differ."

"Yash, yash, our religions differ," he says; "they differ, Levi, don't they?"

"Yash, they do," drawled that theologian.

"Yash, they do; we see our way to that," concluded Goldshed.

Larkin sighed.

There was a short silence here. Mr. Larkin opening his pink eyelids, and showing his small, light blue eyes, while he maintained his easy and gentlemanlike attitude.

The senior member of the firm looked down on his desk, thoughtfully, and picked at an old drop of sealing wax with his office knife, and whistled a few slow bars, and Mr. Levi, looking down also, scribbled the cipher of the firm nineteen times, with flourishes, on a piece of paper.

Mr. Goldshed worked his short thick knees and his heels a little uneasily; the office chair was growing a little bit frisky, it seemed.

"Nishe shailing, Mr. Larkin, and oh, dear! a great lot of delicashy! What do you think?" said Mr. Goldshed, lifting up the office knife, with the edge toward the attorney, and letting it fall back two or three times, between his finger and thumb, dubiously. "The parties being swells,

makesh it more delicate—ticklish—ticklish; do you shinsherely think it's all quite straight?"

"Of course, it's straight. I should hope, Mr. Goldshed, I have never advised any course that was not so," said Mr. Larkin loftily.

"I don't mean religious—law blesh you—I mean *safe*," said Mr. Goldshed, soothingly.

A little pink flush touched the tall, bald forehead of the attorney.

"Whatever is right, sir, is safe; and that, I think, can hardly be wrong—I *hope* not—by which all parties are benefited," said the attorney.

"All parties be da-a-amn—except our shelves. I'm thinking of my shelf—and Mr. Levi, here—and, of courshe, of *you*. Very much of you," he added, courteously.

Mr. Larkin acknowledged his care by a faint meek bow.

"They're swells," repeated Mr. Goldshed.

"He saysh they're swelsh," repeated Mr. Levi, whose grave look had something of the air of a bully in it, fixing his dark prominent eyes on Mr. Larkin, and turning his cheek that way a little, also. "There's a danger in handling a swell—in them matters especially.

"Suppose theresh a contempt?" said Mr. Goldshed, whose chair grew restive, and required management as he spoke.

"He saysh a *contempt*," repeated Mr. Levi, "or shomething worse—by"——

"I'll guarantee you for twopence, Mr. Levi; and pray consider me, and do *not* swear," urged Mr. Larkin.

"If you guarantee us, with a penalty," began Mr. Levi, who chose to take him literally.

"I said *that*, of *course*, Mr. Levi, by way of illustration, only; no one, of course, dreams of guaranteeing another without a proper consideration. I should have hoped you *could* not have misunderstood me. I don't understand guarantees, it is a business I have never touched. I'm content, I hope, with the emoluments of my profession, and what my landed property gives me. I only mean this—that there *is* no risk. What do *we* know of Mr. Dingwell, that is not perfectly above board—perfectly? I challenge the world upon *that*. If anything should happen to fall through, *we*, surely, are not to blame. At the same time if you—looking at it with your experience—apprehend any risk, of course, I couldn't think of allowing you to go on. I can arrange, this evening, and not very far from this house, either."

As Mr. Larkin concluded, he made a feint of rising.

"Baah!" exclaimed Levi. "You don't think we want to back out of thish transhaction, Mr. Larkin? *no*-o-oh! That's not the trick of thish offishe—is it gov'nor? He saysh *no*."

"No," echoed Goldshed.

"No, never—noways! you hear him?" reiterated Mr. Levi. "In for a penny, in for a pound—in for a shilling, in for a thousand. Baah!—No, never."

"No, noways—never!" reverberated Goldshed, in deep, metallic tones. "But, Levi, there, must look an inch or two before his noshe—and sho must I—and sho, my very good friend, Mr. Larkin, must *you*—a bit before your noshe. I don't see no great danger. We all know, the Honorable Arthur Verney is *dead*. We are *sure* of *that*—and all the rest is not worth the odd ha'pensh in that book," and he touched the mighty ledger lying by him, in which millions were entered. "The *rest* is Dingwell's affair."

"Just so, Mr. Goldshed," acquiesced Mr. Larkin. "We go together in that view."

"Da-a-am Dingwell!—what need *we* care for Dingwell?" tolled out Mr. Goldshed, with his ringing bass.

"Baah!—*da-a-am* him!" echoed the junior.

"Yes—a—quite as you say—but where's the good of imprecation? With *that* exception, I quite go with you. It's Dingwell's affair—not *ours*. *We*, of course, go straight—and *I* certainly have no reason to suspect Dingwell of anything crooked or unworthy."

"Oh, no—baah!—*nothing!*" said Levi.

"Nor I," added Goldshed.

"It'sh delicate—it *izh* delicate—but very promishing," said Mr. Goldshed, who was moistening a cigar in his great lips. "Very—and *no*-thing crooked about it."

"No-thing crooked—*no!*" repeated

Mr. Levi, shaking his glossy curls slowly. "But very delicate."

"Then, gentlemen, it's understood —I'm at liberty to assume—that Mr. Dingwell finds one or other of you here whenever he calls after dark, and you'll arrange at once about the little payments."

To which the firm having promptly assented, Mr. Larkin took his leave, and, being a client of consideration, was accompanied to the shabby doorstep by Mr. Levi, who, standing at the halldoor, with his hands in his pockets, nodded slily to him across the flagged courtyard, into the cab window, in a way which Mr. Jos Larkin of the Lodge thought by many degrees too familiar.

"Well—*there's* a cove!" said Mr. Levi, laughing lazily, and showing his long rows of ivory fangs, as he pointed over his shoulder, with the point of his thumb, towards the street.

"Rum un!" said Mr. Goldshed, laughing likewise, as he held his lighted cigar between his fingers.

And they laughed together tranquilly for a little, till, with a sudden access of gravity, Mr. Goldshed observed, with a little wag of his head—

"He's da-a-am clever."

"Yash—da-a-am clever!" echoed Levi.

"Not as much green as you'd put your finger on—I tell you—no muff —devilish good lay, as *you* shall see," continued Goldshed.

"Devilish good—no, no muff—nothing green," repeated Mr. Levi, lighting his cigar. "Good head for speculation—might be a bit too clever, I'm thinking," and he winked gently at his governor.

"Believe you, my boy, if we'd let him—but we won't—will we?" drawled Mr. Goldshed, jocosely.

"Not if I knows it," said Mr. Levi, sitting on the table, with his feet on the stool, and smoking towards the wall.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MR. DINGWELL ARRIVES.

Messrs. Goldshed and Levi owned four houses in Rosemary-court, and Miss Sarah Rumble was their tenant. The court is dark, ancient, and grimy. Miss Rumble let lodgings, worked hard, led an anxious life, and subsisted on a remarkably light diet, and at the end of the year never had a shilling over. Her Jewish landlords used to pay her a visit now and then, to receive the rent, and see that everything was right. These visits she dreaded; they were grumbling and minatory, and enlivened by occasional oaths and curses. But though it was part of their system to keep their tenants on the alert by perpetual fault-findings and menaces, they knew very well that they got every shilling the house brought in, that Miss Rumble lived on next to nothing, and never saved a shilling, and was, in fact, *their* underfed overworked, and indefatigable slave.

With the uncomplaining and modest charity of the poor, Sarah Rumble maintained her little orphan niece and nephew by extra labour at needlework, and wonderful feats of domestic economy.

This waste of resources Mr. Levi grudged. He had never done complaining of it, and demonstrating that it could only be accomplished by her holding the house at too low a rent; how else could it be? Why was she to keep other people's brats at the expense of Messrs. Goldshed and Levi? What was the workhouse for? This perpetual pressure was a sore trouble to the poor woman, who had come to love the children as if they were her own; and after one of Mr. Levi's minatory visits she often lay awake sobbing, in the terror and yearnings of her unspeakable affection, while its unconscious objects lay fast asleep by her side.

From Mr. Levi, in his accustomed vein, Miss Rumble had received full instructions for the reception and entertainment of her new lodger, Mr. Dingwell. He could not say when he would arrive—neither the day nor the hour—and several days had already elapsed and no arrival had taken place. This evening she had gone down to "the shop," so designated, as if there had been but one in London, to lay out a shilling and seven pence very

carefully, leaving her little niece and nephew in charge of the candle and the house, and spelling out their catechism for next day.

A tapping came to the door—not timid nor yet menacing—a sort of double-knock, delivered with a walking-cane; on the whole a sharp but gentlemanlike summons to which the little company assembled there were unused. The children lifted their eyes from the book before them, and stared at the door without answering. It opened with a latch, which without more ado was raised, and a tall, white-haired gentleman, with a stoop and a very brown skin, looked in inquisitively, and said with a smile that was not pleasant, and a voice not loud but somehow harsh and cold—

"Mrs. or *Miss* Rumble hereabouts, my dears?"

"Miss Rumble; that's aunt, please, sir;" answered the little girl, slipping down from her chair and making a courtesy.

"Well, *she's* the lady I want to speak with, my love; where *is* she?" said the gentleman, glancing round the homely chamber from under his white eyebrows with a pair of cold, light, restless eyes.

"She's—she's"—— hesitated the child.

"Not in bed, I see; nor in the cupboard," (the cupboard door was open). "Is she up the chimney, my charming child?"

"No, sir, please; she's gone to Mrs. Chalk's for the bacon."

"Mrs. Chalk's for the bacon?" echoed the gentleman. "Very good! Excellent woman—excellent bacon, I dare say. But how far away is it?—how soon shall we have your aunt back again?"

"Just round the corner, please, sir; aunt's never no time," answered the child. "Would you please call in again?"

"Charming young lady!—so accomplished! Who taught you your grammar? So polite—so *suspicious.* Do you know the meaning of that word, my dear?"

"No, sir, please."

"And I'm vastly obliged for your invitation to call again, but I find your company much too agreeable to think of going away; so if you allow me—and do shut that door, my sweet child; many thanks—I'll do myself the honour to sit down, if I may venture, and continue to enjoy your agreeable conversation, till your aunt returns to favour us with her charming presence and—bacon."

The old gentleman was glancing from under his brows, from corner to corner of this homely chamber; an uneasy habit, not curiosity, and during his ceremonious speech he kept bowing and smiling, and set down a black leather bag that he had in his hand, on the deal table, together with his walking-cane, and pulled off his gloves and warmed his hands at the tiny bit of fire. When his back was toward them the children exchanged a glance, and the little boy looked frightened, and on the point of bursting into tears.

"*Hish!*" whispered the girl, alarmed, for she could not tell what effect the demonstration might have upon the stranger—"*quiet!*"—and she shook her finger in urgent warning at Jemmie. "A *very* nice gent, as has money for auntie—*there!*"

So the tears that stood in Jemmie's big eyes were not followed by an outcry, and the gentleman, with his hat and outside wrapper on, stood with his back to the little fire, looking, in his restless way, over the children's heads, with his white, cold eyes and the same smile. There was a dreamy idea haunting Lucy Maria's head that this gentleman was very like a white animal she had seen at the Surrey Zoological Gardens when her uncle had treated her to that instructive show, the same sort of cruel grin, and the same restless oscillation before the bars of its cage.

"Hey! so she'll be back again?"—said he, recollecting the presence of the two children—"the excellent lady, your aunt I mean. Superb apartment this is, but it strikes me, hardly sufficiently *lighted*, hey? *One* halfpenny candle, however brilliant, can hardly do justice to such a room; pretty taper—very pretty—isn't it? Such nice mutton fat! my dear young lady, and such a fine long snuff—like a chimney with a Quaker's hat on top of it—you don't see such fine things everywhere! And who's this young gentleman, who enjoys the distinction of being admitted to your salon—a page, or what?"

"It's Jemmie, sir; stand up and bow to the gentleman, Jemmie."

Jemmie slipped down on the floor, and made a very alarmed bow, with

his great eyes staring deprecatingly in the visitor's face.

"I'm charmed to make your acquaintance. What grace and ease! It's perfectly charming! I'm too much honoured, Mr. Jemmie. And so exquisitely got up, too! There's only one little toilet refinement I would venture to recommend. The worthy lady, Mrs. Chalks, who contributes bacon to this house, and, I presume, candles—could, I dare say, also supply another luxury, with which you are not so well acquainted, called *soap*—one of the few perfectly safe cosmetics. Pray try it; you'll find it soluble in water. And, ho? reading too! What have you been reading out of that exquisite little volume?"

"Catechism, please sir," answered the little girl.

"Ho, Catechism? Delightful! What a wonderful people we English are!" The latter reflexion was made for his own entertainment, and he laughed over it in an under-tone. "Then your aunt teaches you the art of godliness? You've read about Babel, didn't you?—the accomplishment of getting up to heaven is so nice!"

"Sunday school, sir, please," said the girl.

"Oh, it's *there* you learn it? Well, I shall ask you only one question in your Catechism, and that's the first—what's your name?

"Lucy Maria."

"Well, Lucy Maria and Mr. Jemmie, I trust your theological studies may render you at last as pious as I am. You know how death and sin came into the world, and you know what they are. Sin is doing anything on earth that's pleasant, and death's the penalty of it. Did you ever see any one dead, my sweet child—not able to raise a finger or an eyelid? rather a fix, isn't it?—and screwed up in a stenching box to be eaten by worms—all alone, under ground? *You*'ll be so, egad, and your friend, Jemmie, there, perhaps before me—though I'm an old boy. Younkers go off sometimes by the score. I've seen 'em trundled out in fever and plague, egad, lying in rows, like plucked chickens in a poulterer's shop. And they say you have scarlatina all about you *here*, now; bad complaint, you know, that kills the little children. You need not frighten yourselves though, because it *must* happen, sooner or later—die you *must*. It's the penalty, you know, because Eve once eat an apple."

"Yes, sir."

"Rather hard lines on us, isn't it? She eat an apple, and sin, and death, and colic—I never eat an apple in consequence—*colic* came into the world, and cider, as a consequence—the worst drink ever invented by the devil. And now go on and learn your Church Catechism thoroughly, and you'll both turn into angels. Upon my life, I think I see the feathers beginning to sprout from your shoulders already. You'll have wings, you know, if all goes right, and tails for anything I know."

The little boy looked in his face perplexed and frightened—the little girl, answering his haggard grin with an attempted smile, showed also bewilderment and dismay in her eyes. They were both longing for the return of their aunt.

Childish nature, which is only human nature without its scarf skin, is always afraid of irony. It is not its power, but its treachery that is dreadful—the guise of friendship hiding a baleful purpose underneath. One might fancy the seasoned denizens of Gehenna welcoming, complimenting, and instructing newcomers with these solemn derisions. How children delight in humour! how they wince and quail under irony! Be it ever so rudely fashioned and clumsily handled, still it is to them a terrible weapon. If children are to be either ridiculed or rebuked, let it be honestly, in direct terms. We should not scare them with this jocularity of devils.

Having thus amused himself with the children for a time, he unlocked his leather bag, took out two or three papers, ordered the little girl to snuff the candle, and pulled it across the table to the corner next himself, and, sitting close by, tried to read, holding the letter almost in the flame, screwing his white eyebrows together, and shifting his position, and that of the candle also, with very little regard to the studious convenience of the children.

He gave it up. The red and smoky light tried his eyes too severely. So, not well pleased, he locked his letters up again.

"Cat's eyes—owls! How the devil they read by it passes my comprehension. Any more candles here—hey?" he demanded with a sudden sharpness that made the children start.

"Three, please sir."

"Get 'em."

"On the nail in the closet, please sir."

"Get 'em, d--n it!"

"Closet's locked, please sir. Aunt has the key."

"Ha!" he snarled, and looked at the children as if he would like to pick a quarrel with them.

"Does your aunt allow you to let the fire out on nights like this—hey? You're a charming young lady, *you*—and this young gentleman, in manners and appearance, everything the proudest aunt could desire; but I'm curious to know whether either one or other is of the slightest earthly use; and secondly, whether she keeps a birch-rod in that closet—hey?—and now and then *flogs* you—ha, ha, ha! The expense of the rod is trifling, the pain not worth mentioning, and soon over, but the moral effects are admirable, better and more durable—take my word for it—than all the catechisms in Paternoster-row."

The old gentleman seemed much tickled by his own pleasantries, and laughed viciously as he eyed the children.

"You did not tell me a fib, I hope, my dear, about your aunt? She's a long time about coming; and, I say, do put a little coal on the fire, will you?"

"Coal's locked up, please sir," said the child, who was growing more afraid of him every minute.

"'Gad, it seems to me that worthy woman's afraid you'll carry off the bricks and plaster. Where's the poker? Chained to the wall, I suppose. Well, there's a complaint called kleptomania—it comes with a sort of irritation at the tips of the fingers, and I should not be surprised if you and your friend Jemmie, there, had got it."

Jemmie looked at his fingers' ends, and up in the gentleman's face, in anxious amazement.

"But there's a cure for it—essence of cane—and if that won't do, a capital charm—nine tails of a gray cat applied under competent direction. Your aunt seems to understand that disorder—it begins with an itching in the fingers, and ends with a pain in the back—ha, ha, ha! You're a pair of theologians, and, if you've read John Bunyan, no doubt understand and enjoy an allegory."

"Yes, sir, please, we will," answered poor Lucy Maria, in her perplexity.

"And we'll be very good friends, Miss Marie Louise, or whatever your name is, I've no doubt, provided you play me no tricks and do precisely whatever I bid you; and, upon my soul, if you don't, I'll take the devil out of my pocket and frighten you out of your wits, I will—ha, ha, ha!—so sure as you live, into *fits!*"

And the old gentleman, with an ugly smile on his thin lips, and a frown between his white eyebrows, fixed his glittering gaze on the child and wagged his head.

You may be sure she was relieved when, at that moment, she heard her aunt's well-known step on the lobby, and the latch clicked, the door opened, and Miss Rumble entered.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MR. DINGWELL MAKES HIMSELF COMFORTABLE.

"AH!—*ho!* you are Miss Rumble—hey?" said the old gentleman, fixing a scrutinizing glance from under his white eyebrows upon Sally Rumble, who stood in the doorway, in wonder, not unmixed with alarm; for people who stand every hour in presence of Giant Want, with his sword at their throats, have lost their faith in fortune, and long ceased to expect a benevolent fairy in any stranger who may present himself dubiously, and anticipate rather an enemy. So, looking hard at the gentleman who stood before the little fire, with his hat on, and the light of the solitary dipt candle shining on his by no means pleasant countenance, she made him a little frightened courtesy, and acknowledged that she was Sally Rumble, though she could not tell what was to follow.

"I've been waiting; I come here to see you—pray, shut the door—from

two gentlemen, Jews, whom you know —*friends*—don't be uneasy—friends of *mine*, friends of *yours*—Mr. Goldshed and Mr. Levi, the kindest, sweetest, sharpest fellows alive, and here's a note from them—you can *read ?*"

"Read! Law bless you—yes, sir," answered Sally.

"Thanks for the blessing: read the note; it's only to tell you I'm the person they mentioned this morning, Mr. Dingwell. Are the rooms ready? You can make me comfortable—eh ?"

"In a humble way, sir," she answered, with a courtesy.

"Yes, of course; I'm a humble fellow, and—I hear you're a sensible young lady. These little pitchers here, of course, have ears: I'll say all that's necessary as we go up: there's a fellow with a cab at the door; isn't there ? Well, there's some little luggage of mine on it—we must get it up stairs; give him something to lend a hand; but first let me see my rooms."

"Yes, sir," said Sally, with another courtesy. And Mr. Dingwell, taking up his bag and stick, followed her in silence, as with the dusky candle she led the way up the stairs.

She lighted a pair of candles in the drawing-room. There was some fire in the grate. The rooms looked better than he had expected: there were curtains, and an old Turkish carpet, and some shabby, and some handsome, pieces of furniture.

"It will do, it will do—ha, ha, ha! how like a pawnbroker's store it looks—no two things match in it; but it is not bad: those Jew fellows, of course, did it? All this stuff isn't yours ?" said Mr. Dingwell.

"Law bless you, no sir," answered Sally, with a dismal smile and a shake of her head.

"Thanks again for your blessing. And the bed-room ?" inquired he.

She pushed open the door.

"Capital looking-glass," said he, standing before his dressing-table—"cap-i-tal! if it weren't for that great seam across the middle—ha, ha, ha! funny effect, by Jove! Is it colder than usual, here ?"

"No, sir, please; a nice evening."

"Devilish nice, by Allah! I'm cold through and through my great coat. Will you, please, poke up that fire a little ? Hey! what a grand bed we've got! what tassels and ropes! and, by Jove, carved angels or *Cupids*—I hope, Cupids—on the footboard!" he said, running the tip of his cane along the profile of one of them; "they must have got this a wonderful bargain. Hey! I hope no one died in it, last week?"

"Oh, la! sir; Mr. Levi is a very pitickler gentleman; he wouldn't for all he's worth."

"Oh! not he, I know; very particular."

Mr. Dingwell was holding the piece of damask curtain between his finger and thumb, and she fancied was sniffing at it gently.

"Very particular, but I'm more so. We, English, are the dirtiest dogs in the world. They ought to get the Turks to teach 'em to wash and be clean. I travelled in the East once, for a commercial house, and know something of them. Can you make coffee ?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Very strong ?"

"Yes, sir, sure."

"Very, mind. As strong as the devil it must be, and as clear as—as your *conscience.*" He was getting out a tin case as he spoke. "Here it is. I got it in—I forget the name —a great place, near one of your bridges. I suppose it's as good as any to be had in this place. Of course it isn't *all* coffee. We must go to the *heathen* for that; but if they haven't ground up toasted skeletons, or anything dirty in it, I'm content. I'm told you can't eat or drink a mouthful here without swallowing something you never bargained for. Everything is drugged. You d—d Christian cheats, you're an opprobrium to commerce and civilization; you're the greatest oafs on earth, with all your police and spies. Why it's only to *will* it, and you *don't;* you let it go on. We are assuredly a beastly people!"

"Sugar, please, sir ?"

"No, thank you."

"Take milk, sir ?"

"Heaven forbid! Milk, indeed! I tell you what, Mrs.—what's your name ?—I tell you, if the Sultan had some of your great fellows—your grocers, and bakers, and dairymen, and brewers, egad!—out there, he'd have'em on their ugly faces and bastinado their great feet into custard pudding! I've seen fellows—and

d—d glad I *was* to see it, I can tell you—screaming like stuck pigs, and their eyes starting out of their heads, and their feet like bags of black currant jelly, ha, ha, ha!—for a devilish deal less. Now, you see, ma'em, I have high notions of honesty; and this tin case I'm going to give you will give me three small cups of coffee, as strong as I've described, six times over; do you understand?—six times three—eighteen;—*eighteen* small cups of coffee; and don't let those pretty little foxes' cubs, down stairs, meddle with it. Tell 'em I know what I'm about, and they'd better not, ha, ha, ha!—nor with anything that belongs to me."

Miss Sarah Rumble was a good deal dismayed by the jubilant severity of Mr. Dingwell's morals. She would have been glad he had been of a less sharp and cruel turn of pleasantry. Her heart was heavy, and she wished herself a happy deliverance, and had a vague alarm about the poor little children's falling under suspicion, and of all that might follow. But what could she do? Poverty is so powerless, and has so little time to weigh matters maturely, or to prepare for any change; its hands are always so full, and its stomach so empty, and its spirits so dull.

"I wish those d—d curtains were off the bed," and again they underwent the same disgusting process; "and the bed-clothes, egad! They purify nothing here. You know *nothing* about *them* either, of course? *No;*—but they would not like to kill me No—that would not do. Knock their little game on the head, eh? I suppose it *is* all right. What's prevalent here now? What sort of—I mean what sort of *death*—fever, or small-pox, or scarlatina—eh? Much sickness going?"

"Nothink a'most, sir; a little measles among the children."

"No objection to that; it heads them down a bit, and does not trouble us. But what among the *grown* people?"

"Nothink to signify in the court here, for three months a'most."

"And *then*, ma'am, what *was* it, pray? Give those to your boy" (they were his boots); "let him rub 'em up, ma'am, he's not a bit too young to begin; and egad! he had better do 'em *well*, too;" and, thrusting his feet into a great pair of slippers, he reverted to his question—"What sickness was *then*, ma'am, three months ago, here in this pleasant little prison-yard of a place—hey?"

"Fever, please sir, at No. 4. Three took it, please: two of 'em went to hospital."

"And never walked out?"

"Don't know, indeed, sir—and one died, please sir, in the court here, and he left three little children."

"I hope they're gone away?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Well, that's a release. Rest his soul, he's dead! as our immortal bard, that says everything so much better than any one else ever did, says; and rest our souls, *they're* gone, with their vile noise. So your bill of mortality is not much to signify; and make that coffee—d'ye see?—this moment, and let me have it as hot as—as the final abode of Dissenters and Catholics—I see you believe in the Church Catechism—immediately, if you please, to the next room."

So, with a courtesy, Sally Rumble tripped from the room, with the coffee-case in her hand.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LODGER AND HIS LANDLADY.

Sally was beginning to conceive a great fear of her guest, and terror being the chief spring of activity, in a marvellously short time the coffee was made, and she, with Lucy Maria holding the candle behind her, knocking at what they called the drawing-room door. When, in obedience to his command, she entered, he was standing by the chimney-piece, gazing at her through an atmosphere almost hazy with tobacco smoke. He had got on his dressing-gown, which was pea-green, and a scarlet fez, and stood with his inquisitive smile and frown, and his long pipe a little removed from his lips.

"Oh, it's *you?* yes; no one—do

you mind—except Mr. Larkin, or Mr. Levi, or Mr. Goldshed, ever comes in to me—always charmed to see *you*, and *them*—but there ends my public; so, my dear lady, if any person should ask to see Mr. Dingwell, from New York in America, you'll simply say there's no such person here—yes—there's—*no—such—person—here*—upon my honour. And you're no true woman if you don't say so with pleasure—because it's a fib."

Sarah Rumble courtesied affirmatively.

"I forgot to give you this note, my letter of introduction. Here, ma'am, take it, and read it, if you can. It comes from those eminent harpies, the Messrs. Goldshed and Levi—your landlords, aren't they?"

Another courtesy from grave, dark-browed Miss Rumble acknowledged the fact.

"It is pleasant to be accredited by such gentlemen—good landlords, I dare say?"

"I've nothing to say against Mr. Levi; and I'm 'appy to say, sir, my rent's bin always paid up punctual," she said.

"Yes, just so—capital landlord! charming tenant! and I suspect if you didn't, they'd find a way to make you—eh? Your coffee's not so bad—you may make it next time just a degree stronger, bitter as wormwood and verjuice, please—black and bitter, ma'am, as English prejudice. It isn't badly made, however—no, it *is* really *good*. It isn't a common Christian virtue, making good coffee—the Mahometans have a knack of it, and you must be a bit of a genius, ma'am, for I think you'll make it very respectably by to-morrow evening, or at latest, by next year. You shall do everything well for me, madam. The Dingwells were always d—d flighty, wicked, unreasonable people, ma'am, and you'll find me a regular Dingwell, and *worse*, madam. Look at me—don't I look like a vampire. I tell you, ma'am, I've been buried, and they would not let me rest in my grave, and they've called me up by their d—d incantations, and here I am, ma'am—an evoked spirit. I have not read that bit of paper. How do they introduce me—as Mr. Dingwell, or Mr. Dingwell's ghost? I'm wound up in a sort of way; but I'm deficient in blood, ma'am, and in heat. You'll have to keep the fire up always like *this*, Mrs. Rumble. You better mind, or you'll have me a bit too like a corpse to be pleasant. Egad! I frighten myself in the glass, ma'am. There is what they call transfusion of blood *now*, ma'am, and a very sensible thing it is. Pray don't you think so?"

"I do suppose what you say's correct, sir."

"When a fellow comes out of the grave, ma'am—that's sherry in that bottle; be kind enough to fill this glass—he's chilly, and he wants blood, Mrs. Rumble. A gallon, or so, transfused into my veins wouldn't hurt me. You can't *make* blood fast enough for the wear and tear of life, especially in a place like merry England, as the poets call it—and merry England is as damp all over as one of your charnel vaults under your dirty churches. Egad! it's enough to make a poor ghost like me turn vampire, and drain those rosy little brats of yours—ha, ha, ha!—*your* children, are they, Mrs. Rumble—eh?"

"No, sir, please—my brother's children."

"Your *brother's*—ho! He doesn't live *here*, I hope?"

"He's dead, sir."

"Dead—is he?"

"Five years last May, sir."

"Oh! that's good. And their mother?"—some more sherry, please."

"Dead about four years, poor thing! They're orphans, sir, please."

"'Gad! I *do* please; it's a capital arrangement, ma'am, as they *are* here, and you mustn't let 'em among the children that swarm about places like this. Egad! ma'am, I've no fancy for scarlatina or small-pox, or any sort or description of your nursery maladies."

"They're very 'ealthy, sir, I thank you," said grave Sarah Rumble, a little mistaking Mr. Dingwell's drift.

"Very glad to hear it, ma'am."

"Very kind o' you, sir," said she with a courtesy.

"Kind, of course, yes, very kind," he echoed.

"Very 'ealthy, indeed, sir, I'm thankful to say."

"Well, yes, they do look well—for town brats, you know—plump and rosy—d——n 'em, little skins of red wine; egad! enough to make a fellow turn vampire, as I said. Give

me a little more sherry—thank you, ma'am. Any place near here where they sell ice?"

"Yes, sir, there's Mr. Candy's hice-store, in Love-lane, sir."

"You must arrange to get me a pound, or so, every day at twelve o'clock, broken up in lumps, like sugar, and keep it in a cold cellar; do you mind, ma'am?"

"Yes sir, please."

"How old are *you*, ma'am? Well, *no*, you need not mind—hardly a fair question; a steady woman—a lady who has seen the world—*some*thing of it, hey?" said he; "so have *I*—I'm a steady old fellow, egad!—you must give me a latch-key, ma'am."

"Yes, sir."

"Some ten or twelve years will see us out; curious thing life, ma'am, eh? ha, ha, ha!—Sparkling cup, ma'am, while it lasts—*some*times; pity the flask has so few glasses, and is flat so soon; isn't it so, ma'am?"

"I never drank wine, sir, but once."

"No! where was that?"

"At Mr. Snelly's wedding, twenty years since."

"'Gad, you'd make a good Turk, ma'am—don't mistake me—it's only they drink no wine. You've found life an up-hill business, then, hey?"

Mrs. Rumble sighed profoundly, shook her head, and said—

"I've 'ad my trials, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha! to be sure, why not; then you're a bit *tired*, I dare say; what do you think of death?"

"I wish I was ready, sir."

"An ugly fellow, hey? I don't like the smell of him, ma'am."

"We has our hopes, sir."

"Oh! sure and certain hope—yes, the resurrection, hey?"

"Yes, sir, there's only one thing troubles me—them poor little children; I wouldn't care how soon I went if they was able to do for themselves."

"They do that very early in London—girls especially; and you're giving them such an excellent training—Sunday school—eh—and Church Catechism, I see. The righteous are never forsaken, my excellent mother used to tell me; and if the Catechism does not make little Miss what's-her-name righteous, I'm afraid the rosy little rogue has a spice of the devil in her."

"God forbid, sir."

"Amen, of course, I'm sure they're all right—I hope they are—for I'll whip 'em both; I give you fair warning, on my honour I will, if they give me the least trouble."

"I'll be very careful, sir, and keep them out of the way," said the alarmed Sarah Rumble.

"Oh! I don't care about *that; let* 'em run about, as long as they're good; I've no objection in life to children—quite the contrary—plump little rogues—I like 'em—only, egad! if they're naughty, I'll turn 'em up, mind."

Miss Rumble looked at him with as much alarm as if the threat had been to herself.

He was grinning at her in return, and nodded once or twice sharply.

"Yes, ma'am, lollypops and sugar-candy when they're good; but, egad! when they're naughty, ma'am, you'll hear 'em squalling."

Miss Rumble made an alarmed courtesy.

"'Gad, I forgot how cold this d——d town is. I say, you'll keep a fire in my bed-room, please; lay on enough to carry me through the night, do you mind?"

"Yes, sir."

"And poke this fire up, and put some more wood, or coal, on it; I don't expect to be ever warm again—in *this* world, eh?—ha, ha, ha! I remember our gardener, when we were boys, telling me a story of a preacher in a hard frost, telling his congregation that hell was a terribly cold place, lest if he described what good fires they kept there they'd all have been wishing to get into it. Did you ever know any one, ma'am, of my name, *Dingwell*, before, eh? Where were you born?"

"London, sir, please."

"Ho! Canterbury was *our* place; we were great people, the Dingwells, there once. My father failed, though—fortune of war—and I've seen all the world since; 'gad, I've met with queer people, ma'am, and one of those chances brings me here now. If I had not met the oddest fish I ever set my eyes on, in the most out-o'-the way-place on earth, I should not have had the happiness of occupying this charming apartment at this moment, or of making your acquaintance, or that of your plump little Cupid and Psyche, down stairs.

London, I suppose, is pretty much what it always was, where any fellow with plenty of money may have plenty of fun. Lots of sin in London, ma'am, eh? Not quite so good as Vienna. But the needs and pleasures of all men, according to their degree, are wonderfully provided for; wherever money is there is a market—for the cabman's copper and the guineas of the gentleman he drives—everything for money, ma'am—bouquets, and smiles, and coffins, wooden or leaden, according to your relative fastidiousness. But things change very fast, ma'am. Look at this map; I should not know the town—a wilderness, egad! and no one to tell you where fun is to be found."

She gazed, rather frightened, at this leering, giggling old man, who stood with his shoulders against the chimneypiece, and his hands tumbling over his shillings in his pockets, and his sinister and weary face ever so little flushed with his sherry and his talk.

"Well, if you can give a poor devil a wrinkle of any sort—hey?—it will be a charity; but, egad! I'm as sleepy as the homilies," and he yawned direfully. "Do, like an angel, go and see to my room. I can scarcely keep my eyes open."

From the next room she heard him *hi-yeawing* in long-drawn yawns, and talking in snatches to himself over the fire, and when she came back he took the candle and said—

"Beaten, ma'am, fairly beaten to-night. Not quite what I was, though I'm good for something still; but an old fellow can't do without his sleep."

Mr. Dingwell's extraordinary communicativeness would have quite charmed her, had it not been in a faint way racy of corruption, and followed with a mocking echo of insult, which she caught, but could not accurately interpret. The old rascal was irrepressibly garrulous; but he was too sleepy to talk much more, and looked ruefully worn out.

He took the bed-room candle with a great yawn, and staggering, I am bound to say, only with sleep, he leaned for a moment against the doorway of his room, and said, in his grimmer vein—

"You'll bring me a cup of coffee, mind, at eight o'clock—*black*, no milk, no sugar—and a bit of dry toast, as thin as a knife and as hard as a tile; do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And why the devil don't you say so? And, lest I should forget, Mr. Levi will be here to-morrow, at eleven, with another gentleman. Show them both up; and, I say, there are several things I'm particular about, and I'll put them on paper—egad! that's the best way—to-morrow, and I'll post it up in my room, like a firmaun, and you had better attend to them, that's all;" and holding up his candle, as he stood in the doorway, he gazed round the bed-room, and seemed satisfied, and shut the door sharply in her face, without turning about, or perhaps intending that rudeness, as she was executing her valedictory courtesy.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN WHICH MR. DINGWELL PUTS HIS HAND TO THE POKER.

At eleven o'clock next morning, Mr. Dingwell was refreshed, and ready to receive his expected visitors. He had just finished a pipe as he heard their approaching steps upon the stairs, and Miss Sarah Rumble pushed open the door and permitted Mr. Levi and his friend to enter and announce themselves. Mr. Dingwell received them with a slight bow and a rather sarcastic smile.

Mr. Levi entered first, with his lazy smile showing his glittering fangs, and his fierce, cunning, prominent eyes swept the room, and rested on Mr. Dingwell. Putting down his hat on the middle of the narrow table, he stooped across, extending his lank arm and long hand toward the white-headed old man with the broad forehead and lean brown face, who happened to turn to the chimneypiece just then, to look for a paper, and so did not shake hands.

"And Mr. Larkin?" said Mr. Dingwell, with the same smile, as he turned about and saw that slim, bald, pink-eyed impersonation of Christianity overtopping the dark and glossy representative of the Mosaic dispensation.

"Sit down, pray—though—eh?—

has my friend, Miss Rumble, left us chairs enough?" said Mr. Dingwell, looking from corner to corner.

"Quite ample; thanks, many thanks," answered Mr. Larkin, who chose, benignantly, to take this attention to himself. "Three chairs, yes, and three of us; pray, Mr. Dingwell, don't take any trouble."

"Oh! thank you; but I was not thinking of taking any trouble, only I should not like to be left without a chair. Miss Sarah Rumble, I dare say she's very virtuous, but she's not brilliant," he continued, as he approached. "*There*, for instance, her pot-house habits! She leaves my old hat on the centre of the table!" and with a sudden sweep of the ebony stem of his long pipe, he knocked Mr. Levi's hat upon the floor, and kicked it into the far corner of the room.

"Da-a-am it; that'sh my hat!" said Mr. Levi, looking after it.

"So much the better for *me*," said Mr. Dingwell, with an agreeable smile and a nod.

"An error—quite a mistake," interposed Mr. Larkin, with officious politeness. "Shall *I* pick it up, Mr. Levi?"

"Leave it lay," said Mr. Levi, sulkily; "no use now. It's got its allowance, I expect."

"Gentlemen, you'll not detain me longer than is necessary, if you please, because I hate business, on *principle*, as a Jew does ham—I beg pardon Mr. Levi, I forgot for a moment—the greatest respect for your religion, but I do hate business as I hate an attorney, or the devil himself—'Gad! there is my foot in it again: Mr. Larkin, no reflection, I assure you, on your excellent profession, which everyone respects. But life's made up of hours: they're precious, and I don't want to spoil 'em."

"A great trust, sir, a great trust, Mr. Dingwell, is *time*. Ah, sir, how little we make of it, with eternity yawning at our feet, and retribution before us!"

"*Our* and *us*; you don't narrow it to your own profession, Mr. Larkin?"

"I speak of time, generally, Mr. Dingwell, and of eternity, and retribution, as applicable to all professions," said Mr. Larkin, sadly.

"I don't follow you, sir. Here's a paper, gentlemen, on which I have noted exactly what I can prove."

"Can I have it, Mr. Dingwell?" said the attorney, whose dove-like eyes for a moment contracted with a hungry, rat-like look.

"No, I think, *no*," said Mr. Dingwell, withdrawing it from the long, red fingers extended to catch the paper; Mr. Levi's fingers, at a more modest distance, were also extended, and also disappointed; "anything I write myself I have a kind of feeling about it; I'd rather keep it to myself, or put it in the fire, than trouble the most artless Jew or religious attorney I know with the custody of it: so, if you just allow me, I'll read it; it's only half a dozen lines, and I don't care if you make a note of it, Mr. Larkin."

"Well," he resumed, after he had glanced through the paper, Mr. Larkin sitting expectant *arrectis auribus*, and with a pen in his fingers, "you may say that I, Mr. Dingwell, knew the late Honorable Arthur Verney, otherwise Hakim Frank, otherwise Hakim Giaour, otherwise Mamhoud Ali Ben-Nezir, for five years and two months, and upwards—three days, I think, immediately preceding his death; for the latter four years very intimately. That I frequently procured him small loans of money, and saw him, one way or another, nearly every day of my life: that I was with him nearly twice a day during his last illness: that I was present when he expired, and was one of the three persons who saw him buried: and that I could point out his grave, if it were thought desirable to send out persons acquainted with his appearance, to disinter and identify the body."

"No need of that, I think," said Mr. Larkin, looking up and twiddling his eye-glass on his finger.

He glanced at Levi, who was listening intensely, and almost awfully, and, reading no sign in his face, he added:—

"*However*, I see no harm in making the note."

So on went Mr. Dingwell, holding a pair of gold glasses over his nose.

"I can perfectly identify him as the Hon. Arthur Verney, having transacted business for him respecting an annuity which was paid him by his family; written letters for him when his hand was affected; and read his

letters for him when he was ill, which latter letters, together with a voluminous correspondence found in his box, and now in my possession, I can identify also as having been in *his*."

"I don't see any need, my dear Mr. Dingwell, of your mentioning your having written any letters for him; it has, in fact, no bearing that I can recognize upon the case. I should, in fact, apprehend complicating the case. You might find it difficult to specify, and we to produce, the particular letters referred to; so I should simply say you *read* them to him, at his desire, before he despatched them for England; that is, of course, assuming that you did so."

"Very good, sir; knock it out, and put that in; and I can prove that these letters, which can easily, I suppose, be identified by the writers of them in England, were in his possession, and that several of them I can recollect his having read to me on the day he received them. That's pretty nearly what strikes me—eh?"

"Yes, sir—certainly, Mr. Dingwell—most important; but surely he had a servant; had he not, my dear sir?—an attendant of some sort? they're to be had there for next to nothing, I think," hesitated Mr. Larkin.

"Certainly—so there was—yes; but he started for Egypt in a boat full of tiles, or onions, or something, a day or two after the Hakim was buried, and I'm afraid they'll find it rather hard to find him. I think he said Egypt, but I won't swear."

And Mr. Dingwell laughed, very much tickled, with intense sarcastic enjoyment; so much so that Mr. Larkin, though I have seldom before or since heard of his laughing, *did* suddenly laugh a short, explosive laugh, as he looked down on the table, and immediately looked very grave and sad, and pinked up to the very summit of his narrow bald head; and coughing a little, he said—

"Thank you, Mr. Dingwell; this will suffice very nicely for an outline, and I can consult with our adviser as to its particular sufficiency—is not that your impression, Mr. Levi?"

"You lawyer chaps undusta-ans that line of business best; I know no more about it than watch-making—only don't shleep over it, for it's costing us a da-a-am lot of money," said Mr. Levi, rising with a long yawn and a stretch, and emphasizing it with a dismal oath; and shutting his great glaring eyes and shaking his head, as if he were being victimized at a pace which no capital could long stand.

"Certainly, Mr. Levi," said the attorney, "you quite take me with you there. We are all contributing, except, perhaps, our valued friend, Mr. Dingwell, our quota towards a very exhausting expense."

"Da-a-md exhausting," interposed Mr. Levi.

"Well, pray allow me my own superlative," said the attorney, with religious grandeur. "I do say it is very exhausting; though we are all, I hope, *cheerfully* contributing——".

"D—n you; to be sure you are," said Mr. Dingwell, with an abrupt profanity that startled Mr. Larkin. "Because you all expect to make money by it; and I'm contributing my time, and trouble, and danger, egad! for precisely the same reason. And now, before you go—just a moment, if you please, as we are on the subject—who's Chancellor of the Exchequer here?"

"Who advances the necessary funds?" interpreted Mr. Larkin, with his politest smile.

"Yes," said the old man, with a sharp menacing nod. "Which of you two comes down, as you say, with the dust? Who pays the piper for this dance of yours, gentlemen?—the Christian or the Jew? I've a word for the gentleman who holds the purse—or, as we Christians would say, who carries the bag;" and he glanced from one to the other with a sniff, and another rather vicious wag of his head.

"I believe, sir, you may address us both as *voluntary* contributors towards a fund for carrying on, for the *present*, this business of the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, who will, of course, recoup us," said Mr. Larkin, cautiously.

He used to say sometimes to his conducting man, with a smile, sly and holy, up at the yellow letters of one of the tin deed-boxes on his shelves at the Lodge, after an adroit conversation, "I think it will puzzle him, rather, to make an *assumpsit* out of *that*."

"Well, you talk of *allowing* me—as you term it—four pounds a week.

I'll not take it," said Mr. Dingwell, viciously.

"My hye! That'sh liberal, shir, da-a-am 'anshome, be-Ga-a-ad!" exclaimed Mr. Levi, in a blessed mistake as to the nature of Mr. Dingwell's objection.

"I know, gentlemen, this business can't advance without me—to me it may be worth something; but you'll make it worth a great deal more to yourselves, and whatever you may find me, you'll find me no fool; and I'll not take one penny less than five-and-twenty pounds a week.

"Five-and-twenty pounsh!" Howled Mr. Levi; and Mr. Larkin's small pink eyes opened wide at the prodigious idea.

"You gentlemen fancy you're to keep me here in this black-hole making *your* fortunes, and living on the wages of a clerk, egad! You shall do no such thing, I promise you; you shall pay me what I say. I'll see the town, sir, and I'll have a few guineas in my pocket, or I'll know the reason why. I didn't come ALL the way here for nothing—d—n you both!"

"Pray, sir, a moment," pleaded Mr. Larkin.

"*Pray*, sir, as much as you like; but *pay*, also, if you please. Egad! you *shall*. Fortune owes me something, and egad! I'll enjoy while I can."

"Of course, sir; quite reasonable—so you should; but, my dear Mr. Dingwell, five-and-twenty pounds!—we can hardly be expected, my dear sir, to see our way."

"Gad, sir, *I* see *mine*, and I'll go it," laughed Mr. Dingwell, with a most unpleasant glare in his eyes.

"On reflection, you will see, my dear Mr. Dingwell, the extreme inexpediency of anything in the least resembling a *fracays* (Mr. Larkin so pronounced his French) in your particular case. I should certainly, my dear sir, recommend a most cautious line."

"Cauteous as the devil," seconded Mr. Levi.

"You think I'm afraid of my liabilities," croaked Mr. Dingwell, with a sudden flush across his forehead, and a spasm of his brows over his wild eyes, and then he laughed, and wagged his head.

"That's right—quite right," almost sighed Mr. Larkin—"do—do—*pray* do—just *reflect* for only a *moment*—and you'll *see* it."

"To be sure, I *see* it, and *you* shall see it, too. Egad, I know something, sir, at my years. I know how to deal with screws, and bullies, and schemers, sir—and that is by *going straight at* them—and I'll tell you what, sir, if you don't pay me the money I name, I'll make you regret it."

For a moment, Mr. Larkin, for one, did almost regret his share in this uncomfortable and highly "speculative" business. If this Mr. Dingwell chose to turn restive and extortionate, it would have been better it had never entered into his ingenious head, and he could already see in the Jew's eyes the sulky and ferocious expression that seemed to forebode defeat.

"If you don't treat me, as I say, with common fairness, I'll go straight to young Mr. Verney myself, and put you out of the baby-house altogether."

"*What* babby-houshe?" demanded Mr. Levi, glowering, and hanging the corners of his great half-open mouth with a sullen ferocity.

"Your castle—in the air—your d—d plot, sir."

"If you mean you're going to turn stag," began the Jew.

"*There*—do—pray, Mr. Levi—you—you *mistake*," interposed Mr. Larkin imploringly, who had heard tales of this Mr. Dingwell's mad temper.

"I say," continued Levi, "if you're going to split"——

"Split, sir?" cried Mr. Dingwell, with a malignant frown, and drawing his mouth together into a puckered ring, as he looked askance at the Jew. "What the devil do you mean by *split*, sir? Gad! sir, I'd split your d—d black head for you, you little Jew miscreant!"

Mr. Larkin saw with a qualm that the sinews of that evil face were quivering with an insane fury, and that even under its sun-darkened skin it had turned pale, while the old man's hand was instinctively extended towards the poker, of which he was thinking, and which was uncomfortably near.

"No, no, *no*—pray, gentlemen—I *entreat*—only *think*," urged Mr. Larkin, seriously alarmed for the Queen's peace and his own precious character.

Mr. Larkin confronted the Jew, with his great hands upon Mr. Levi's shoulders, so as to prevent his advance; but that slender Hebrew, who was an accomplished sparrer, gave the godly attorney a jerk by the elbows which quite twirled him about, to his amazement and chagrin.

"'Andsh off, old chap," said the Jew, grimly, to Mr. Larkin, who had not endured such a liberty since he was at his cheap day-school, nearly forty years ago.

But Mr. Larkin interposed again, much alarmed, for behind him he thought he heard the clink of the fire-irons.

"He thinks he may say what he pleases," cried the old man's voice furiously, with a kind of choking laugh.

No, sir—no, Mr. Dingwell—I assure you—*do*, Mr. Levi—how *can* you mind him?" he added in an undertone, as he stood between.

"I *don't* mind him, Mr. Larkin; only I won't let no one draw it that sort. I won't stand a lick of a poker for no one; he shan't come that over me"—and concurrently with this the shrill voice of Mr. Dingwell was yelling—

"Because I'm—because I'm—I'm—every d—d little whipper-snapper—because they think I'm down, the *wretches*, I'm to submit to their insults."

"I *don't* want to hurt him, Mr. Larkin; if I did, I'd give'm his tea in a mug this minute; but I don't, I say—only he shan't lift a poker to *me*."

"No one, my dear sir, has touched a poker; no one, Mr. Levi, ever dreamed of such a thing. Pray, my dear sir, my dear Mr. Dingwell, don't misconceive; we use slang phrases, now and then, without the *least* meaning or disrespect: it has become quite the tong. I assure you—it was only last week, at Nyworth Castle, where I had the honour to be received, Lady Mary Wrangham used the phrase *yarn*, for a long story."

"D—n you, can't you answer my question?" said Mr. Dingwell, more in his accustomed vein.

"Certainly, sir," we'll apply to it. Do, Mr. Levi, *do* leave the room; your presence at this moment only leads to excitement."

Levi, for a moment, pondered fiercely, and then nodded a sulky acquiescence.

"I shall overtake you in the court, Mr. Levi, if you can wait two or three minutes there."

The Jew nodded over his shoulder, and was gone.

"Mr. Dingwell, sir, I can't, I assure you. It's not in my power; it is in the hands of quite other people, on whom, ultimately, of course, these expenses will fall, to sanction the outlay by way of weekly allowance, which you suggest. But I will apply in the proper quarter, without delay. I wish, Mr. Dingwell, I *were* the party; you and I would not, I venture to think, be long in settling it between us."

"No, to be sure, you're all such liberal fellows—it's always some one else that puts us under the screw," laughed Mr. Dingwell, discordantly, with his face still flushed, and his hand trembling visibly, "you never have the stock yourselves—not you, there's always, Mr. Sheridan tells us, you know, in that capital play of his, a d——d unconscionable fellow in the background, and in Shakespeare's play, *Shylock*, you know, he hasn't the money himself, but *Tubal*, a wealthy Hebrew of his tribe, will furnish him. Hey! I suppose they gave the immortal Shakespeare a squeeze in his day; he understood 'em. But Shylock and Tubal are both dead and rotten long ago. It's a comfort you can't escape death, with all your cunning, d—n you."

But Mr. Larkin spoke peaceably to Mr. Dingwell. The expense, up to a certain time, would, of course, fall upon Mr. Kiffyn Verney; after that, however, Mr. Larkin and the Jew firm would feel it. But be it how it might, they could not afford to quarrel with Mr. Dingwell; and Mr. Dingwell was a man of a flighty and furious temper.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CLEVE VERNEY SEES THE CHATEAU DE CRESSERON.

I FANCY that these estimates, on a rather large scale, moved by Mr. Dingwell, were agreed to, for sufficient reasons, by the parties interested in disputing them.

Mr. Dingwell kept very close during the daytime. He used to wander listlessly to and fro, between his bedroom and his drawingroom, with his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown, and his feet in a pair of hard leather slippers, with curled-up toes and no heels, that clattered on the boards like sabots.

Miss Sarah Rumble fancied that her lodger was a little shy of the windows; when he looked out into the court, he stood back a yard or more from the window-sill.

Mr. Larkin, indeed, made no secret of Mr. Dingwell's uncomfortable position, in his conferences with the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney. Mr. Dingwell had been a bankrupt, against whom many transactions to which the Court had applied forcible epithets, had been proved; to whom, in fact, that tribunal had refused quarter; and who had escaped from its fangs by a miracle. There were judgments, however, in force against him; there was a warrant procurable any day for his arrest; he was still "in contempt;" I believe he was an "outlaw;" and, in fact, there was all but a price set on his head. Thus, between him and his outcast acquaintance, the late Hon. Arthur Verney, had subsisted some strong points of sympathy, which had no doubt helped to draw them into that near intimacy which stood the Hon. Kiffyn, no less than Mr. Dingwell (to whose mill it was bringing very comfortable grist), so well in stead, at this moment.

It behoved Mr. Dingwell, therefore, to exercise caution. Many years had passed since he figured as a London trader. But time, the obliterator, in some cases works slowly; or rather, while the pleasant things of memory are sketched in with a pencil, the others are written in a bold, legible, round hand, as it were, with a broad-nibbed steel pen, and the best durable japanned ink; on which Father Time works his India-rubber in vain, till his gouty old fingers ache, and you can fancy him whistling curses through his gums, and knocking his bald pate with his knuckles. Mr. Dingwell, on the way home, was, to his horror, half recognized by an ancient Cockney at Malta. Time, therefore, was not to be relied upon, though thirty years had passed; and Mr. Dingwell began to fear that a debtor is never forgotten, and that the man who is thoroughly dipt, like the lovely woman who stoops to folly, has but one way to escape consequences, and that is to die—a step which Mr. Dingwell did not care to take.

The meeting on the 15th, at the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney's house, Mr. Dingwell was prevented by a cold from attending. But the note of his evidence sufficed, and the consultation, at which Mr. Larkin assisted, was quite satisfactory. The eminent Parliamentary counsel who attended, and who made, that session, nearly fifty-thousand pounds, went to the heart of the matter direct; was reverentially listened to by his junior, by the Parliamentary agent, by the serious Mr. Larkin, at whom he thrust sharp questions, in a peremptory and even fierce way, like a general in action, to whom minutes are everything; treated them once or twice to a recollection or short anecdote, which tended to show what a clever, sharp fellow the great Parliamentary counsel was, which, indeed, was true; and talked to no one quite from a level, except to the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, to whom he spoke confidentially in his ear, and who himself quickly grew into the same confidential relations.

"I'm glad you take my view—Mr. —Mr. Forsythe—very happy, about it, that we should be in accord. I've learned some confidence in my opinion, having found it more than once, I may say, come out right; and it gives me further confidence that you take my view," said the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, grandly.

That eminent Parliamentary coun-

sel, Forsythe, was on his way to the door, when Mr. Verney interposed with his condescension.

"Oh! Ha! Do I? Very happy. What is it?" said Forsythe, smiling briskly, glancing at his watch and edging towards the door, all together.

"I mean the confident view—the cheerful—about it," said the Hon. Mr. Verney, a little flushed, and laying his thin hand on his counsel's arm.

"Certainly—confident, of course, smooth sailing, *quite.* I see no hitch, *at present.*"

Mr. Foresythe was now, more decidedly, going. But he could not treat the Hon. Kiffyn Verney quite like an ordinary client, for he was before him occasionally in Committees of the House of Commons, and was likely soon to be so in others of the Lords, and, therefore, chafing and smiling, he hesitated under the light pressure of the old gentleman's stiff fingers.

"And you know the, I may say, *absurd* state of the law, about it—there was, you know, my unfortunate brother, Arthur—you are aware—*civiliter mortuus*, stopping the way, you know, for nearly twenty years, about it, ever since my poor father, Lord Verney, you know, expired, about it, and I've been, as you know, in the most painful position—*absurd*, you know."

"*Quite* so; I'm *afraid*—" Forsythe was again edging toward the door.

"And I always contended that where the heir was civilly dead, about it, the law should make proper provision—don't you see?"

"Quite so, only *fair*—a very wise and politic statute—and I wish very much, with your experience, you'd turn your attention to draw one. I'm obliged to be off now, to meet the New Discount directors; consultation at my chambers."

And so, smiling, Forsythe, Q.C., did vanish, at last.

All this over, Mr. Cleve Verney proposed to himself a little excursion, of a day or two, to Paris, to which his uncle saw no objection.

Not very far from the ancient town of Caen, where the comparative quietude of Normandy, throughout the throes of the great revolution, has spared so many relics of the bygone France, is an old chateau, still habitable—still, after a fashion, comfortable—and which you may have at a very moderate rent, indeed.

Here is an old wood, cut in a quincunx; old ponds stocked with carp; great old stables gone to decay; and the chateau itself, is indescribably picturesque and sad.

It is the Chateau de Cresseron—withdrawn in historic seclusion, amid the glories and regrets of memory, quite out of the tide of modern traffic.

Here, by the side of one of the ponds, one evening, stood an old lady, throwing in little bits of bread to the carp that floated and flitted, like golden shadows, this way and that, as the crumbs sank in the water, when she heard a well-known voice near her, which made her start.

"Good heavens! Mr. Verney! *You* here?" she exclaimed, with such utter wonderment, her little bit of bread raised in her fingers, that Cleve Verney, though in no merry mood, could not help smiling.

"Yes—here indeed—and after all, is it quite so wonderful?" said he.

"Well, of course you know, Mr. Verney, I'm very glad to see you. Of course, you know *that;* but I'm very far from being certain that you have done a wise or a prudent thing in coming here, and I don't know that, under the circumstances, I *ought* to be glad to see you; in fact, I'm afraid it is *very rash*," said Miss Sheckleton, growing more decided as she proceeded.

"No, not rash. I've been very miserable, *so* miserable that the worst certainty which this visit might bring me, would be almost a relief compared with the intolerable suspense I have lived in; therefore, you see, it really is not rash."

"I'm very bad at an argument," persisted the old lady; "but it *is* rash, and *very* rash—you can't conceive," and here she lowered her voice, "the state of exasperation in which he is."

"He," of course, could only mean Sir Booth Fanshawe; and Cleve answered—

"I assure you, I can't blame him. I don't wonder. I think a great deal has been very wantonly done to aggravate his misfortunes; but surely, he can't fancy that I could sympathise with any such proceedings, or

feel anything but horror and disgust. Surely, *you* would not allow him to connect me, however slightly? I *know* you would not."

"My dear Mr. Verney, you don't know Booth Fanshawe, or rather, you do, I believe, know him a great deal too well, to fancy that I could venture to speak to him upon the subject. *That*, I assure you, is quite out of the question; and I may as well tell you frankly, if he were at home, I mean *here*, I should have begged you at once, inhospitable as it might seem, to leave this place, and trust to time and to letters, but *here* I would *not* have allowed you to linger."

"He's away from home, then!" exclaimed Cleve.

"Yes; but he'll be back to-night, at ten o'clock."

"At ten o'clock," repeated Cleve, and the young man thought what a treasure of minutes there was in the interval. "And Miss Fanshawe—Margaret—she's quite well?"

"Yes, she's quite well," answered kind Miss Sheckleton, looking in his earnest eyes, and thinking that he looked a little thin and pale. "She's quite well and, I hope, you have been."

"Oh, yes," answered the young man, "as well as a man with a good many troubles can be. In fact, I may tell *you*, I've been very unhappy. I was thinking of writing to Sir Booth."

"*Don't*," implored Miss Sheckleton, looking quite wildly into his eyes, and with her hand upon his arm, as if to arrest the writing of that letter, "you have no notion how he feels. I assure you, an allusion—the slightest thing is quite enough to set him in a blaze. The other day, for instance, I did not know what it was, till I took up the paper he had been reading, and I found there something about the Verney peerage, and proof that Arthur Verney was dead, and your uncle to get it; and really I can't wonder—some people seem so unaccountably fortunate, and others, everything goes wrong with—even *I* felt vexed when I read it, though, of course, any good fortune happening to *you*, I should be very glad of. But he did not see any of us till next day—even Macklin."

"Yes, it is very true," said Cleve, "my uncle *is* dead, and we shall prove it, that is, my uncle Kiffyn will. But you are quite right to distinguish as you do. It involves nothing for me. Since it has come so near, I have lost all faith in its ever reaching me. I have, I can't call it a conviction, but a *superstition*, that it never will. I must build my own fortunes from their foundations, with my own hand. There is but one success on earth that can make me very proud and very happy. Do you think, that having come all this way, in that hope, on that one chance, that Margaret will see me?"

"I wish you had written to me before coming," said Anne Sheckleton, after a little pause. "I should have liked to find out first, all I could, from herself, she is so odd. I've often told you that she *is* odd. I think it would have been wiser to write to me before coming over, and I should have talked to her, that is, of couse, if she had allowed me, for I can't in the least say, that she would even hear me on the subject."

"Well," said Cleve, with a sigh, "I have come—I am here—and go I cannot without seeing her—I cannot—and you, I think, are too kind to wish that I should. Yes, Miss Sheckleton, you have been my true friend throughout this—what shall I call it?—wild and terrible dream—for I cannot believe it real—I wonder at it myself—I ought to wish I had never seen her—but I cannot—and I think on the result of this visit depends the whole course of my life. You'll not see me long, I think, in the House of Commons, nor in England; but I'll tell you more by-and-bye.

It was sunset now. A red and melancholy glow, rising from piles of western cloud, melted gradually eastward into the deep blue of night, in which the stars were already glimmering.

Along one of the broad avenues cut through the forest that debouches upon the court-yard of the quaint old chateau they were now walking, and, raising his eyes, he saw Margaret approaching from the antique house.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SHE COMES AND SPEAKS.

"SHE is coming, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, speaking low and quietly; but her voice sounded a little strangely, and I think the good-natured spinster was agitated.

Cleve, walking by her side, made no answer. He saw Margaret approach, and while she was yet a good way off, suddenly stop. She had not seen them before. There seemed no indecision. It was simply that she was startled, and stood still.

"Pray, Miss Sheckleton, do you go on alone. *Entreat* her not to refuse me a few minutes," said he.

"I will—she shall—I will, indeed, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, very much fidgetted. "But you had better remain where we were, just now; I will return to you, and—there are some French servants at the house—will you think me very strange—unkind, I am sure, you will *not*—if I say it is only common prudence that you should not be seen at the house? You understand why I say so."

"Certainly. I shall do whatever you think best," he answered. They had arrested their walk, as Margaret had done, during this little parley. Perhaps she was uncertain whether her approach had been observed. The sun had gone down by this time, and the twilight had begun to make distant objects a little indistinct.

But there was no time for manœuvring here, for Miss Fanshawe resumed her walk, and her cousin, Anne Sheckleton, advanced alone to meet her.

"Margaret, dear, a friend has unexpectedly arrived," began Miss Sheckleton.

"And gone, perhaps," answered Margaret Fanshawe, in one of her moods. "*Better* gone—come, darling, let us turn, and go towards home—it is growing so dark."

And with these words, taking Miss Sheckleton's hand in hers, she turned towards the house, not choosing to see the friend whom that elderly lady had so eagerly indicated.

Strangely did Cleve Verney feel. That beautiful, cruel girl!—what could she mean?—how could she treat him so? Is there not, in strange countries, where people meet, a kindlier impulse than elsewhere?—and here—could anything be more stoney and utterly cruel? The same wonderful *Cenci*—the same low, sweet voice—the same laugh, even—just for a moment—but now—how unspeakably cruel! He could see that Miss Sheckleton was talking earnestly to her, as they walked slowly away. It all seemed like a dream. The formal old wood—the gray chateau in the background, rising, with its round turrets, and conical tops, and steep roofs against the rose-tinted sky of evening; and in the foreground—not two score steps away—those figures—that girl to whom so lately he was so near being all the world—to whom, it now appeared, he was absolutely nothing—oh! that he had never heard, in Shakespeare's phrase, that mermaid voice!

His pride was wounded. With a yearning that amounted to agony, he watched their receding steps. Follow them he would not. He leaned against the tree by which Miss Sheckleton had left him, and half resolved to quit that melancholy scene of his worst disaster without another look or word—with only the regrets of all a life.

When Miss Sheckleton had reached Margaret, before the young lady spoke, she saw, by her unusual paleness and by something at once of pain and anger in her face, that she had seen Cleve Verney.

"Well, Margaret, if you *will* go, you *will*; but, before you make it irreparable, you must, at least, think."

"Think of what?" said Margaret, a little disdainfully.

"Think that he has come all this way for nothing but the chance of seeing you; of perhaps saying a few words to set himself right."

"If he wished to speak to me, he might have said so," she answered. "Not that I see any reason to change my mind on that point, or any

good that can come, possibly, or for ever, if he could talk and I listen for so long."

"Well, but you can't doubt what he has come for," said Miss Sheckleton.

"I don't doubt, because I don't mean to think about it," said the young lady, looking fiercely up toward the gilded weather vanes that swung gently on the gray pinnacles of the chateau.

"Yes, but it *is* not a matter of doubt, or of thinking, but of fact, for he *did* say so," pleaded Miss Sheckleton.

"I wish we were in Italy, or some out-of-the-way part of Spain," said the handsome girl, in the same vein, and walking still onward; "I always said this was too near England, too much in the current."

"No, dear, it is a quiet place," said good Anne Sheckleton.

"No, cousin Anne, it is the most *un*quiet place in all the world," answered the girl, in a wild, low tone, as she walked on.

"And he wants to speak to you; he entreats a few words, a very few."

"You *know* I ought not," said she.

"I know you *ought*, my dear; you'll be sorry for it, all your days, Margaret, if you don't," replied Anne Sheckleton.

"Come home, dear, come home, darling," said the girl, peremptorily, but sadly.

"I say, Margaret, if you let him go without speaking to him, you will regret it all your days."

"You have no right to talk this way, cousin Anne; I am unhappy enough as it is; come on," said she.

"If you send him away, as I say, it is all over between you."

"So it is, it *is* all over; let the dead rest."

"The world is wide enough; there are many beautiful creatures there, and he is himself so beautiful, and so clever; be very sure you care nothing for him, before you send him away, for you will never see him again," said Miss Anne Sheckleton.

"I know—I am sure—I have thought of everything. I have made up my account long ago, for now, and for all my days," said she.

"So you *have*," answered Miss Sheckleton. But while you have a moment still allowed you, Margaret, review it, I entreat of you."

"Come, darling, come—come—you ought not to have spoken to me; why have you said all this?" said Margaret, sadly and hurriedly.

"Now, Margaret darling, you are going to stay for a moment, and I will call him."

"*No!*" said the girl, passionately, "my mind's made up; not in haste, cousin Anne, but long ago. I've looked my last on him."

"Now, darling, listen: you know, *I've* seen him, he's looking ill, I think; and I've told him that you *must* speak to him, Margaret; and I tell *you* you must," said Miss Sheckleton, blushing in her eagerness.

"No, cousin Anne, let there be an end of this between us; I thought it was over long ago. To him, I will never, never—while life remains—never speak more."

As she thus spoke, walking more hurriedly toward the house, she heard a voice beside her say—

"Margaret! Margaret, darling—one word!"

And turning suddenly, she saw Cleve Verney before her. Under the thick folds of her chestnut hair, her features were pale as marble, and for a time, it seemed to him he saw nothing but her wild, beautiful eyes fixed upon him.

Still as a statue, she stood confronting him. One little foot advanced, and her tiny hand closed, and pressed to her heart in the attitude in which an affrighted Nun might hold her crucifix.

"Yes, Margaret," he said at last, "I was as near going—as you were near leaving me—unheard; but, thank God, *that* is not to be. No, Margaret darling, you *could* not. Wild as my words may sound in your ears, you will listen to them, for they shall be few; you will listen to them, for you are too good to condemn any one that ever loved you unheard."

There was a little pause, during which all that passed was a silent pressure of Miss Sheckleton's hand upon Margaret's, as very pale, and with her brow knit in a painful anxiety, she drew hurriedly back, and left the two young people together, standing by the roots of the old tree, under the faint, rose-tinted sky of evening.

Lovers' promises or lovers' cruelties

—which oaths are most enduring? Where now were Margaret's vows? Oh! inexhaustible fountain of pity, and beautiful mutability of woman's heart! In the passion avowed, so often something of simulation; in the feeling disowned, so often the true and beautiful life. Who shall read this wonderful riddle, running in romance, and in song, and in war, the world's history through?

"Margaret, will you hear me?" he pleaded.

To her it was like a voice in a dream, and a form seen there, in that dream-land in which we meet the dead, without wonder, forgetting time and separation.

"I don't know that I ought to change my purpose. I don't know why I do; but we shall never meet again, I am sure, so speak on."

"Yes, Margaret, I will speak on, and tell you how entirely you have mistaken and wronged me," said Cleve Verney, in the same sad and passionate tones.

Good-natured Anne Sheckleton, watching at a little distance, saw the talk—at first belonging altogether to Mr. Verney, at last begin to divide itself a little; then side by side they walked a few steps, and then paused again: and so once more a short way, the lady looking down, and then on and on to the margin of that long straight pond, on which in their season are floating water-lilies, and, under its great oblong mirror, gliding those golden fishes which are, as we have seen, one of our spinster friend's kindly resources in this quaint exile. And so the twilight deepened: and Miss Sheckleton saw these two figures like shadows gliding side by side, to and fro, along the margin, till the moonlight came and lighted the still pool over, and dappled the sward with the shadows of the trees, and made the old chateau in the background, with its white front, its turrets and pinnacles and gilded vanes, look filmy as a fairy castle.

Wrapping her cloak about her, she sat herself down upon the marble seat close by, unobserved and pleased, watching this picture of Lorenzo and Jessica, and of all such moonlighted colloquies, with a wonderful and excited interest—with, indeed, a mixture of melancholy and delight and fear.

Half-hour after half-hour glided by, as she looked on this picture, and read in fancy the romance that was weaving itself out of the silvery thread of their sweet discourse in this sad old scene. And then she looked at her watch, and wondered how the time had sped, and sighed; and smiling and asking no question, came before them, and in a low, gentle warning, told them that the hour for parting had come.

As they stood side by side in the moonlight, did the beautiful girl, with the flush of that romantic hour, never, never to be forgotten, on her cheek, with its light in her wonderful eyes, ever look so beautiful before? Or did that young man, Cleve Verney, whom she thought she understood, but did not, ever look so handsome?—the enthusiasm and the glow of his victory in his strangely beautiful face.

There were a few silent moments: and she thought could fancy paint a more beautiful young couple than these!

There are scenes—only momentary—so near Paradise—sights, so nearly angelic, that they touch us with a mysterious ecstasy and sorrow. In the glory and translation of the moment, the feeling of its transitariness, and the sense of our mortal lot, cross and thrill us with a strange pain, like the mysterious anguish that mingles in the rapture of sublime music. So, Miss Sheckleton, very pale, smiling very tenderly, sobbed and wept, one would have said bitterly, for a little while; and, drying her eyes quickly, saw before her the same beautiful young faces looking upon hers; and the old lady took their hands and pressed them, and smiled a great deal through her tears, and said—"All, at last, as I wished it: God bless you both—God Almighty bless you, my darling:" and she put her arms about Margaret's neck, and kissed her very tenderly.

And then came the reminder, that must not be slighted. The hour had come, indeed, and Cleve must positively go. Miss Sheckleton would hear of no further delay—no, not another minute. Her fear of Sir Booth was profound; so, with a "God bless you, darling," and a very pale face, and—why should there not be—one long, long kiss, Cleve Verney took his leave, and was gone; and

the sailing moon lost herself among clouds, so darkness stole swiftly over the landscape.

Margaret Fanshawe drew her dear old cousin near to her, and in turn, placing her arms round her neck, folded her close, and Anne Sheckleton could feel the wild throbbing of the young girl's heart close to her own.

Margaret was not weeping, but she stood very pale, with her arms still laid on her cousin's shoulders, and looked almost wildly down into her wistful eyes.

"Cousin Anne—oh, darling! you must pray for me," said Margaret Fanshawe. "I thought it could never be; I thought I knew myself, but all *that* is vain: there is another will above us—Fate—Eternal Fate, and I am where I am, I know not how."

"Why, Margaret, darling, it is what I have been longing for—the very best thing that could have happened; you ought to be the happiest girl in the world," urged Miss Anne Sheckleton, cheerily.

"No, darling; I am not happy, except in this, that I know I love him, and would not give him up for all the world; but it seems to me to have been, from first to last, a fatality, and I can't shake off the fear that lies at my heart."

"Hush, dear—I hear wheels, I think," said Miss Sheckleton, listening.

Margaret was pre-occupied, and did not listen. I don't think she cared much at that moment who came or went, except that one to whom her love was now irrevocably given.

"No; I can't hear—no; but he will be here immediately. We must not be out, you know; he may ask for me, and he is so—so very—what shall I say?"

Margaret did not mind. She turned a wild and plaintive look upward towards the struggling moon—now emerging, now lost again—and she said,

"Come, darling—let us go," said Margaret.

And she looked round her gently, as if awaking from a dream.

"Come, darling," she continued, placing her hand on Anne Sheckleton's arm.

"Yes; and you are not to tease yourself, Margaret, dear, with fancies and follies. As I said before, you ought to be one of the happiest girls in existence."

"So I am—in a sense—in a degree," she answered, dreamily—"very happy—oh! wonderfully happy—but there is—and I can't help it—the feeling of something overhanging me. I don't know what—*fatal*, as I said; but, be it what it may, let it come. I could not lose him now, for all the world."

She was looking up, as she spoke, toward the broken moonlight, herself as pale, and a strange plaintive smile of rapture broke over her beautiful face, as if answering the smile of a spirit in the air.

"Come, darling, come," whispered Miss Sheckleton, and they walked side by side in silence to the house, and so to Margaret's room, where she sat down by the window, looking out, and kind Anne Sheckleton sat by the table, with her thin old hand to her cheek, watching her fondly, and awaiting an opportunity to speak, for she was longing to hear a great deal more.

THE TENANTS OF MALORY.

BY J. S. LE FANU, AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CLEVE VERNEY HAS A VISITER.

So Cleve Verney returned to England, and his friends thought his trip to Paris, short as it was, had done him a world of good. What an alterative and tonic a little change of air sometimes is!

The Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney was, in his high, thin-minded way, at last tolerably content, and more pompous and respected than ever. The proof of his succession to the peerage of Verney was in a perfectly satisfactory state. He would prove it, and take his seat next Session. He would add another to the long list of Lords Viscounts Verney of Malory to be found in the gold and scarlet chronicle of such dignities. He had arranged with the trustees for a provisional possession of Verney House, the great stone mansion which blocks one side of the small parallelogram called Verney-square. Already contractors had visited it and explored its noble chambers and long corridors, with foot-rule and note-book, getting together material for tenders, and Cleve had already a room there when he came up to town. Some furniture had got in, and some servants were established there also, and so the stream of life had begun to transfuse itself from the old town residence of the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney into these long-forsaken channels.

Here, one morning, called a gentleman named Dingwell, whom Cleve Verney, happening to be in town, desired the servant to show into the room where he sat, with his breakfast, and his newspapers about him.

The tall old man entered, with a slight stoop, leering, Cleve thought, a little sarcastically over his shoulder as he did so.

Mr. Dingwell underwent Mr. Cleve Verney's reception, smiling oddly, under his white eyebrows, after his wont.

"I suspect some little mistake, isn't there?" said he, in his cold, harsh, quiet tones. "You can hardly be the brother of my old friend Arthur Verney. I had hoped to see Mr. Kiffyn Fulke Verney—I—eh?"

"I'm his nephew."

"Oh! *nephew?* Yes—another generation—yes, of course. I called to

see the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney. I was not able to attend the consultation, or whatever you call it. You know I'm your principal witness, eh? Dingwell's my name."

"Oh, to be sure—I beg pardon, Mr. Dingwell," said Cleve, who, by one of those odd slips of memory, which sometimes occur, had failed to connect the name with the case, on its turning up thus unexpectedly.

"I hope your admirable uncle, Kiffyn Verney, is, at all events, *alive* and *approachable*," said the old man, glancing grimly about the room; "though perhaps *you're* his next heir, and the hope is hardly polite?"

This impertinence of Mr. Dingwell's, Mr. Cleve Verney, who knew his importance, and had heard something of his odd temper, resented only by asking him to be seated.

"*That*," said the old man, with a vicious laugh and a flush, also angry, "is a liberty which I was about to take uninvited, by right of my years and fatigue, eh?"

And he sat down with the air of a man who is rather nettled than pleased by an attention.

"And what about Mr. Kiffyn Verney?" he asked, sharply.

"My uncle is in the country," answered Cleve, who would have liked to answer the fool according to his folly, but he succumbed to the necessity, inculcated with much shrewdness, garnished with some references to Scripture, by Mr. Jos. Larkin, of indulging the eccentricities of Mr. Dingwell's temper a little.

"Then he *is* alive? I've heard such an account of the Verneys, their lives are so brittle, and snap so suddenly; my poor friend Arthur told me, and that Jew fellow Levi here, who seems so intimate with the family—d—n him!—says the same: no London house likes to insure them. Well, I see you don't like it: no one does; the smell of the coffin, sir; time enough when we are carrion, and fill it. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, sir, *quite*," said Cleve, drily.

"No young man likes the sight of that stinking old lantern-jawed fellow, who shall be nameless, looking over his spade so slily; but the best way is to do as I've done. Since you must meet him *one* day, go up to him, and make his acquaintance, and shake hands; and egad! when you've grown a little bit intimate, he's not half so disgusting, and sometimes he's even a little bit funny."

"If I were thinking of the profession of a sexton, or an undertaker, I might," began Cleve, who felt a profound disgust of this old Mr. Dingwell, "but as I don't, and since by the time it comes to my turn, I shall be pretty well past seeing and smelling"——

"Don't be too sure of that," said Mr. Dingwell, with one of his ugly smirks. "But it isn't about such matters that I want to trouble you; in fact, I came to say a word to your uncle; but as I can't see him, you can tell him, and urge it more eloquently too, than I can. You and he are both orators by profession; and tell him he must give me five hundred pounds, immediately."

"Five hundred pounds! *Why?*" said Cleve, with a scornful surprise.

"Because I want it," answered the old gentleman, squaring himself, and with the corner of his mouth drawn oddly in, his white head a little a one side, and his eyebrows raised, with altogether an air of vicious defiance.

"You have had your allowance raised very much, sir—it is an exorbitant allowance—what reason can you now urge for this, I must say, extraordinary request?" answered Cleve.

"The *same* reason, sir, precisely. If I don't get it I shall go away, *re infecta*, and leave you to find out proof of the death how you may."

Cleve was very near giving this vile old extortioner a bit of his mind, and ordering him out of the house, on the instant. But Mr. Larkin had been so very urgent on the point, that he commanded himself.

"I hardly think, sir, you can be serious," said Cleve.

"Egad, sir, you'll find it a serious matter if you don't; for, upon my soul, unless I'm paid, and *well* paid for it, I'll depose to nothing."

"That's plain speaking, at all events," said Mr. Cleve Verney.

"Oh! sir, I'll speak more plainly still," said Mr. Dingwell, with a short sarcastic bow. "I never mince matters; life is too short for circumlocutions."

"*Verney* life, at all events, by your account, sir, and I don't desire them.

I shall mention the matter to my uncle to-day in my letter, but I really can't undertake to do more, for I may tell you frankly, Mr. Dingwell, I can't, for the life of me, understand what you can possibly want of such a sum."

"I suppose, young gentleman, you have your pleasures, and I have mine, and they're not to be had without money; and egad, sir, if you fancy it's for love of your old uncle or of you, that I'm here, and taking all this trouble, you are very much mistaken; and if I help you to this house, and the title, and estates, I'll take leave to help myself to some little amusement—money I mean, also. Cool fellows, egad."

The brown features of the old man flushed again angrily as he laughed.

"Well, Mr. Dingwell. I can only repeat what I have said, and I will also speak to Mr. Larkin. I have no power in the business myself, and you had better talk to him," said Cleve.

"I prefer the fountain-head, sir. I don't care twopence how you arrange it among yourselves; but you must give me the money by Saturday."

"Rather an early day, Mr. Dingwell; however, as I said, the question is for my uncle, it can't affect me," said Cleve.

Mr. Dingwell mused angrily for a little, and Cleve thought his face one of the wickedest he had ever seen, while in this state of excited rumination.

"You all—*both* owe me more in that man's death—there are very odd circumstances about it, I can tell you—than, perhaps, you at present imagine," said Mr. Dingwell, looking up suddenly, with a dismal sneer, which subsided into an equally dismal stare.

Cleve, for a second or two, returned the stare, while the question crossed his mind: "Can the old villain mean that my miserable uncle met his death by foul means, in which he took a part, and intends to throw that consideration in with his averred services, to enhance his claim?"

"You had better tell your uncle, with my compliments," said Mr. Dingwell, "that he'll make a kettle of fish of the whole affair, in a way he doesn't expect, unless he makes matters square with me. I often think I'm a d——d idiot, sir, to let you off as I do."

"I don't see, Mr. Dingwell, that you are letting us off, as you say, so very easily," answered Cleve, with a cold smile.

"No, you *don't* see, but I'll *make* you see it," said Mr. Dingwell, very tartly, and with an unpleasant laugh. "Arthur Verney was always changing his quarters—was never in the light. He went by different nicknames. There were in all Constantinople but two men, except myself, the Consul, and the stockbroker, who cashed the money-orders for him, who could identify him, or who knew his name. He lived in the dark, and not very cleanly—you'll excuse the simile—like one of your sewer-rats. He died suddenly and oddly, sir, like a candle on which has fallen a drop of water, with a splutter and a flash, in a moment—one of your Verney deaths, sir. You might as well hope to prove the death of a particular town-dog there, without kennel, or master, or name, a year after his brothers had eaten him. So, sir, I see my value."

"I don't recollect that my uncle ever disputed it," replied Mr. Cleve Verney.

"I understand your difficulty perfectly. The presumption of English law, ha! ha! ha! is in favour of the duration of human life, whenever you can't prove a death. So, English law, which we can't dispute—for it is the perfection of human wisdom—places the putrid body of my late friend Arthur in the robes, coronet, and staff of the Verneys, and would give him the spending of the rents, too, but that you can't make a horse drink, though you may bring him to the water. At all events, sir, my festering friend in the shroud will hold secure possession of the estates against all comers till he exhausts that patient presumption, and sees Kiffyn, and you, sir, and every Verney now alive, laid with their faces upward. So, sir, you see I know my value. I have the grand arcanum; I hold in my hand the Philosopher's Stone that can turn your pewter and brass into gold. I hold it fast, sir, and, egad! I'll run away with it, unless I see a reason." And the old gentleman laughed, and

shrugged and expanded his slender hands with a deprecation that was menacing.

Cleve was very angry, but he was also alarmed; for Mr. Dingwell looked quite capable of any treason against the Verney interest to which his avarice or his spites might prompt him. A wild, cold, wandering eye; a play of the nostrils, and a corrugation of the brows that gave to his smile, or his laugh, a menace that was villanous, and almost insane—warned the young man of the quality of the beast, and invited him to the exercise of all his self-control.

"I am quite certain, Mr. Dingwell, that my uncle will do whatever is reasonable and fair, and I am also sure that he feels his obligations to you. I shall take care that he hears all that you have said, and you understand that I literally have neither power nor influence in his decision."

"Well, he feels his obligations?" said Mr. Dingwell. "That is pleasant."

"Certainly; and, as I said, whatever is fair and reasonable I am certain he will do," said Cleve Verney.

"Fair and reasonable—that is exactly the thing—the *value;* and you know—

> 'The worth precise of anything
> Is so much money as 'twill bring.'

And I'll make it bring what I say; and I make it a rule to treat money matters in the grossest terms, because that is the only language which is at once intelligible and direct—and grossness I believe to be the soul of business; and so, sir, tell him with my compliments, I shall expect five hundred pounds at ten o'clock in the morning, in Bank of England notes."

At this moment the servant announced the Rev. Isaac Dixie, and Mr. Dingwell stood up, and, looking with a kind of amusement and scorn round the room upon the dusty portraits, made a sharp bow to Cleve Verney, and saying—

"That's all; good morning, sir"—with another nod, turned about, and walked jauntily out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE REV. ISAAC DIXIE SETS FORTH ON A MISSION.

There was a basis of truth in all that Mr. Dingwell had said, which made his voice more grating, his eye more dangerous, and his language more disgusting.

Would that Fortune had sent them, Cleve thought, some enchanted horse, other than that beast, to fly them into the fairy-land of their long-deferred ambition! Would that she had sent them a Rarey, to lead him by a metaphoric halter, and quell, by his art, the devil within him—the evil spirit before which something in Cleve's nature quailed, because it seemed to know nothing but appetite, and was destitute of human sympathy or moral foresight.

Dingwell was beset with dangers and devils of his own; but he stood in his magic circle, making mouths and shaking his fist, and grinning at them. He seemed to have no imagination to awe, or prudence to restrain him. He was aware, and so was Cleve, that Larkin knew all about his old bankruptcy, the judgments against him, the impounded forgeries on which he had been on the brink of indictment, and his escape from prison; and yet he railed at Larkin, and defied the powerful Verneys, as if he had been an angel sent to illuminate, to lecture and to rule them.

Mr. Larkin was usually an adroit and effectual tamer of evil beasts, in such case as this Mr. Dingwell. He waved his thin wand of red-hot iron with a light and firm hand, and made every raw smoke in turn, till the lion was fit to lie down with the lamb. But this Dingwell was an eccentric brute; he had no awe for the superior nature, no respect for the imposing airs of the tamer—not the slightest appreciation even of his cautery. On the contrary, he seemed to like the sensation, and amuse himself with the exposure of his sores to the inspection of Mr. Larkin, who began to feel himself drawn into an embarrassing and highly disreputable confidence.

Mr. Larkin had latterly quite given up the idea of frightening Mr. Dingwell, for when he tried that

method, Mr. Dingwell had grown uncomfortably lively and skittish, and, in fact, frightened the exemplary Mr. Larkin confoundedly. He had recapitulated his own enormities with an elation and frightful merriment worthy of a scandalous corner at a Walpurges ball; had demonstrated that he perfectly understood the game of the serious attorney, and showed himself so curiously thick of skin, and withal so *sportive* and formidable a rhinoceros, that Mr. Larkin then and there learned a lesson, and vowed no more to try the mesmerism that succeeded with others, or the hot rod of iron under which they winced and gasped and succumbed.

Such a systematic, and even dangerous defiance of everything good, he had never encountered before. Such a person exactly as this Mr. Dingwell he could not have imagined. There was, he feared, a vein of insanity in that unfortunate man which made him insensible to the extreme peril of his own position, and enabled him actually to frighten the cautious Mr. Larkin, who was always girded with three coats of mail, and seven walls of brass, and I know not how many talismans beside.

He had seen quite enough of the horrid adroitness of Mr. Dingwell's horse-play, and felt such qualms whenever that animal capered and snorted, that he contented himself with musing and wondering over his unintelligible idiosyncrasies, and adopted a studiously soothing treatment with him—talked to him in a friendly, and even tender way—and had some vague plans of getting him ultimately into a mad-house.

But Mr. Dingwell was by this time getting into his cab, with a drapery of mufflers round him, and telling the man through the front window to drive to Rosemary Court; he leaned back in a corner, and chuckled and snorted in a conceited ecstasy over his victory, and the money which was coming to minister to no good in this evil world.

Now, Cleve Verney leaned back in his chair, and there rose before him a view of a moonlighted wood, and old chateau, with its many peaked turrets, and steep roofs, showing silvery against the deep, liquid sky of night, and with a sigh, he saw on the white worn steps, that beautiful, wonderful shape that was his hope and his fate; and as he leaned on his hand, the Reverend Isaac Dixie, whose name had strangely summoned this picture from the sea of his fancy, entered the room, smiling rosily, after his wont, and extending his broad hand, as he marched with deliberate strides across the floor, as much as to say—"Here I am, your own old tutor and admirer, who always predicted great things for you; I know you are charmed, as I am; I know how you will greet me."

"Ha! old Dixie," and Cleve got up, with a kind of effort, and not advancing very far, shook hands.

"So you have got your leave—a week—or *how* long?"

"I've arranged for next Sunday, that's all, my dear Mr. Verney; some little inconvenience, but very happy—always happy."

"Come, I want to have a talk with you," said Cleve, drawing the clergyman to a chair; "Don't you remember, you ought, you know, what Lord Sparkish (isn't it?) says in Swift's Polite Conversations—''Tis as cheap sitting as standing.'"

The clergyman took the chair, simpering bashfully, for the allusion was cruel, and referred to a time when the Reverend Isaac Dixie, being as yet young in the ways of the world, and somewhat slow in apprehending literary ironies, had actually put his pupil through a grave course of "Polite Conversation," which he picked up among some odd volumes of the works of the great Dean of St. Patrick's, on the school-room shelf at Malory.

"And for my accomplishment of saying smart things in a polite way, I am entirely obliged to you and Dean Swift," said Cleve, mischievously.

"Ah! ha! you were always fond of a jest, my dear Mr. Verney; you liked poking fun, you did, at your old tutor; but you know how that really was—I have explained it so often; still, I do allow, the jest is not a bad one."

But Cleve's mind was already on quite another subject.

"And now, Dixie," said he with a sharp glance into the clergyman's eyes, "you know, or at least you guess, what it is I want you to do for me?"

The clergyman looked down by his gaiter, with his head a little a-one-side, and his mouth a little pursed; and said he, after a momentary silence—

"I really, I may say, *unaffectedly*, assure you that I do not."

"You're a queer fellow, old Dixie," said Cleve; "you won't be vexed, but you are always a little bit too clever; I did not tell you exactly, but I told you enough to enable you to guess it. Don't you remember our last talk; come now, Dixie, you're no muff."

"I hope not, my dear Cleve; I may be, but I don't pretend to that character, though I have still, I apprehend, much to learn in the world's ways."

"Yes, of course," said the young man; and tapped his small teeth that glittered under his moustache, with the end of his pencil-case, while he lazily watched the face of the clergyman from under his long lashes.

"And I assure you," continued the clergyman, "if I were to pretend that I did apprehend your intentions, I should be guilty of an inaccuracy amounting, in fact, to an untruth."

He thought he detected something a little mocking in the handsome face of the young gentleman, and could not tell, in the shadow of the window-curtain, whether those even white teeth were not smiling at him outright; and a little nettled, but not forgetting himself, he went on—

"You know, my dear Cleve, it is nothing on earth to *me*—absolutely; I act merely to oblige—merely, I mean to be useful—if in my power, consistently with all other considerations, and I speak, I humbly, but confidently hope, habitually the truth"——

"Of *course* you do," said the young gentleman, with emphasis, and growing quite serious again. "It is very kind, I know, your coming all this way, and managing your week's absence; and you may for the present know just as little or as much of the matter as you please; only mind, this is—not of course in any wrong sense—a dark business—awfully quiet. They say that in England, a talent for speaking may raise a man to anything, but I think a talent for holding one's tongue is sometimes a better one. And—I'm quite serious, old Dixie—I'll not forget your fidelity to me, upon my honour—really, never; and as you know, I may yet have the power of proving it."

The Rev. Isaac Dixie folded his hands, and hung his head sideways in a meek modesty, and withal smiled so rosily and gloriously, as he sate in front of the window, that had it happened an hour before sunrise, the sparrows in the ivy all along the stable walls, would undoubtedly have mistaken it for the glow of Aurora, and commenced their chirping and twittering salutations to the dawn an hour too soon.

"It is very gratifying, *very*, you cannot readily estimate, my dear, and—may I not say?—my *illustrious* pupil, *how* gratifying to me, quite irrespective of all those substantially kind intentions which you are pleased to avow in my behalf, to hear from your lips so frank and—may I say—almost affectionate a declaration; so just an estimate of my devotion to your interests, and I may say, I hope, of my character generally?"

The Rector of Clay was smiling with a huge bashfulness, and slowly folding and rubbing one hand over the other, with his head gently inclined, and his great blue chin upon his guileless, single-breasted, black silk bosom, as he spoke all this in mellow effusion.

"Now, Dixie," said the young man, while a very anxious expression for the first time showed itself in his face, "I want you to do me a kindness—a kindness that will tie me to you all the days of my life. It is something, but not much; chiefly that you will have to keep a secret, and take some little trouble, which I know you don't mind; but nothing serious, not the slightest irregularity, a trifle, I assure you, and chiefly, as I said, that you will have to keep a secret for me."

Dixie also looked a good deal graver as he bowed his acquiescence, trying to smile on, and still sliding his hands softly, one over the other.

"I know you guess what it is—no matter—we'll not discuss it, dear Dixie; it's quite past that now. You'll have to make a little trip for me—you'll not mind it; only across what you used to call the herring-pond; and you must wait at the Silver Lion at Caen; it is the best place there—I

wish it was better—not a soul will see you—I mean English, no one but quiet French people; and there is quite amusement, for a day or so, in looking over the old town. Just wait there, and I'll let you know everything before you have been two days there. I've got your passport; you shall have no trouble. And you need not go to a bank, there's French money here; and you'll keep it, and spend it for me till I see you; and you must go *to-day*."

"And, of course, I know it is nothing *wrong*, my dear Cleve; but we are told to avoid even the *appearance* of evil. And in any case, I should not, of course, for the world, offend your uncle—Lord Verney, I may call him now—the head of the family, and my very kind patron; for I trust I never forget a kindness; and if it should turn out to be anything which by any chance he might misinterpret, I may reckon upon your religious silence, my dear Cleve, as respects my name?"

"Silence! of course—I'd die before I should tell, under any pressure. I think you know I can keep a secret, and my own especially. And never trust my honour more if your name is ever breathed in connexion with any little service you may render me."

He pressed the Rev. Isaac Dixie's hand very earnestly as he spoke.

"And now, will you kindly take charge of this for me, and do as I said?" continued Cleve, placing the French money in Dixie's not unwilling hand. "And on this paper I have made a note of the best way—all about the boat and the rest; and God bless you, my dear Dixie, goodbye."

"And God bless *you*, my dear Cleve," reciprocated the clergyman, and they shook hands again, and the clergyman smiled blandly and tenderly; and as he closed the door, and crossed the hall, grew very thoughtful, and looked as if he were getting into a possible mess.

Cleve, too, was very pale as he stood by the window, looking into the sooty garden at the back of Verney House.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OVER THE HERRING-POND.

LIKE the vision that had visited Cleve as he sate in the breakfast-room of Verney House, awaiting the Rev. Isaac Dixie, the old Chateau de Cresseron shared that night in the soft yet brilliant moonlight. That clergyman—vulgar, I am afraid; worldly, perhaps; certainly not beautiful—had undertaken this foreign mission into the land of romance; and among its shadows and enchanted lights, and heroic phantoms, looked I am afraid, incongruous, as the long-eared, shaggy head of Bottom in the fairy-haunted wood near Athens.

In the ancient town of Caen, in the Silver Lion, the Rev. Isaac Dixie that evening made himself partially understood, and altogether comfortable. He had an excellent dinner, and partook, moderately of course, of the very best vintage in the crypt of that venerable inn. Why should he not? Was he not making harmless holiday, and guilty of no extravagance; for had not Mr. Cleve Verney buckled a long purse to his girdle, and told him to dip his fingers in it as often and as deep as he pleased? And if he undertook the task—trod out Cleve Verney's corn, surely it was no business of his to call for a muzzle, and deny himself his heart's content.

In that exquisite moonlight, having had his cup of coffee, the Rev. Isaac Dixie made a loitering promenade: everything was bewitching—a little wonderful, he fancied—a little strange—from his shadow, that looked so sharp on the white road, to the gothic fronts and gables of old carved houses, emitting ruddy glimmerings from diamond casements high in air, and half melting in the deep liquid sky, gleaming with stars over his head.

All was perfectly French in language and costume: not a note of the familiar English accent mingled in the foreign hum of life. He was quite at his ease. To all censorious eyes he walked invisible; and, shall I tell it? Why not? For in truth, if

his bishop, who abhors that narcotic, and who, I am sure, never reads novels, and therefore cannot read it here, learns nothing of it, the telling can hurt nobody. He smoked three great cheroots, mild and fragrant, that evening, in the ancient streets of Caen, and returned to his inn, odorous of that perfume.

It would have been altogether a delicious excursion, had there not been a suspense and an anxiety to trouble the divine. The Rev. Isaac Dixie regretted now that he had not asked Cleve to define his object. He suspected, but did not know its nature. He had no idea how obstinately and amazingly the problem would recur to his mind, and how serious would grow his qualms as the hour of revelation drew near.

The same moon is shining over the ancient streets of Caen, and over smoke-canopied Verney House, and over the quaint and lonely Chateau de Cresseron. In a tapestried room in this old French house candles were burning, the window open, and Margaret Fanshawe sitting at it, and looking out on the moonlit woods and waters, and breathing the still air, that was this night soft as summer, in the raptures of a strange dream: a dream—no more; the uncertainty is over, and all her griefs. No longer is she one of that forlorn race that hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. She is not born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward, but translated. Alas! the angelic voice has not yet proclaimed "that God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." These words are for the glorified, who have passed the gates of death.

In this bliss, as in all that pertains to love, reason has small share. The heart rejoices as the birds sing. A great suspense—the greatest care that visits the young heart—has ended in a blessed certainty, and in so far the state resembles heaven; but, as in all mortal happiness, there mingles in this also a sadness like distant music.

Old Sir Booth Fanshawe is away on one of his mysterious journeys, and cannot return for three or four days, at soonest. I do not know whether things are beginning to look brighter with Sir Booth, or whether his affairs are being managed into *utter* ruin. Meanwhile, the evil spirit has departed from the house, and the spirit of music has come, music with yet a cadence of sadness in it.

This fair, quaint landscape, and beautiful moonlight! Who ever looks on such a scene that does not feel a melancholy mingling in his delight?

"The moon shines bright:—In such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,
And they did make no noise; in such a night,
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls,
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cresid lay that night. In such a night
Stood Dido, with a willow in her hand,
Upon the wild sea-banks, and waved her love
To come again to Carthage."

Thus, in the visions of the Seer who lies in Stratford-on-Avon, moonlight and love and melancholy are related; and so it is, and will be, to the end of time, till mortal love is no more, and sadness ends, and the moon is changed to blood, and all things are made new.

And now over the moonlit water, through the boughs of the old trees, the still night air is thrilled with a sweet contralto—a homely song—the echo of childish days and the nursery. Poor Milly! her maid, who died so early, whose lover was a young sailor, far away, used to sing it for her in the summer evenings, when they sat down under the hawthorns, on Winnockhough, looking toward the sea, though the sea was many a mile away:—

"As Eve went forth from Paradise,
She, weeping, bore away
One flower, that, reared in tears and sighs,
Is growing to this day.

Where'er the children of the fall
Are toiling to this hour,
It blooms for each, it blooms for all,
And Love we call this flower.

Red roses of the bygone year
Are mingled with the mould,
And other roses will appear
Where they grew pale and old.

But where it grew, no other grows,
No bloom restores the sear;
So this resembles not the rose,
And knows no other year.

So, welcome, when thy bloom is red,
The glory of thy light;
And welcome when thy bloom is shed,
The long sleep of my night."

And now the song is ended, and, listening, Nature seems to sigh; and looking toward the old chateau, the front next you is in shadow, the window is open, and within you see *two* ladies. The elder is standing by the girl, who sits still at the open window, looking up into the face of her old friend—the old friend who has known, in the early days of romance, what love is, for whom now the bloom is shed, and mingling with the mould, but who remembers sadly the blush and glory of its light that died five-and-thirty years ago upon Canadian snows.

Gently the old lady takes her hand, and sits beside her girlish kinswoman, and lays her other hand over that, and smiles with a strange look of affection, and admiration, and immeasurable compassion that somehow seems to translate her, it is so sad and angelic. I cannot hear what she is saying, but the young lady looks up, and kisses her thin cheek, and lays her head upon her old shoulder.

Behind, high over the steep roofs and pinnacles, and those glimmering weather-vanes, that seem sometimes to melt quite away, hangs the moon, unclouded—meet emblem of a pure love—no longer crossed by the sorrows of true love's course—Dian the Chaste, with her sad, pure, and beautifully misleading light—alas! the emblem, also, of mutation.

In a few concise and somewhat dry sentences, as old prison stones bear the records which thin hands, long since turned to dust, have carved, the world's corridors and corners bear the tracings of others that were busy two thousand years ago; and the inscriptions that tell the trite story of human fears and sadness, cut sharp and deep in the rock, tell simply and briefly how Death was the King of Terrors, and the shortness of Life the bitter wonder, and black Care the companion of the wayfarers who marched by the same route to the same goal, so long ago. These gigantic griefs and horrors are all in a nutshell. A few words tell them. Their terror is in their truth. There is no use in expanding them: they are sublimely simple. Among the shadowy men and women that people these pages, I see them everywhere—plots too big and complicated to be got, by any compression, within the few pages and narrow covers of the book of their lives: Care, in her old black weeds, and Death, with stealthy foot and blow like thunder.

Twelve months had come and gone for ever since the Reverend Isaac Dixie made that little trip to Caen, every month bringing his portion of blossom, fruit, or blight to every mortal. All had gone well and gloriously in this Verney Peerage matter.

The death of the late Honorable Arthur Verney was proved; and the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, as next heir, having complied with the proper forms, duly succeeded to the ancient peerage of the Verneys. So the dream was accomplished more splendidly, perhaps, than if the prize had come earlier, for the estates were in such condition as they had never attained to since the great rebellion; and if Viscount Verney was not among the most potent of his peers, the fault was not in the peerage and its belongings.

I don't know that Lord Verney was on the whole a happier man than the Honorable Kiffyn had been. He had become somewhat more exacting; his pride pronounced itself more implacably; men felt it more, because he was really more formidable. Whatever the Viscount in the box might be, the drag he drove was heavy, and men more alert in getting out of his way than they would, perhaps, had he been a better whip.

He had at length his heart's desire; but still there was something wanting. He was not quite where he ought to be. With his boroughs, and his command of one county, and potent influence in another, he ought to have been decidedly a greater man. He could not complain of being slighted. The minister saw him when he chose; he was listened to, and in all respects courteously endured. But there was something unsatisfactory.

He was not *telling*, as he had expected. Perhaps he had no very clear conceptions to impress. He had misgivings, too, that secretly depressed and irritated him. He saw Twyndle's eye wander wildly, and caught him yawning stealthily into his hand, while he was giving him his view of the affair of "the Matilda Briggs," and the right of search. He had seen Foljambe, of the Treasury, suddenly laugh at something he thought was particularly wise, while unfolding to that gentleman, in the drawing-room, after dinner, his ideas about local loans, in aid of agriculture. Foljambe did not laugh outright. It was only a tremulous qualm of a second, and he was solemn again, and rather abashed. Lord Verney paused, and looked for a second, with stern inquiry in his face, and then proceeded politely. But Lord Verney never thought or spoke well of Foljambe again; and often reviewed what he had said, in secret, to try and make out where the absurdity lay, and was shy of ventilating that particular plan again, and sometimes suspected that it was the boroughs and the county, and not Kiffyn Lord Verney, that were listened to.

As the organ of self-esteem is the region of our chief consolations and irritations (and its condition regulates temper), this undivulged mortification, you may be sure, did not make Lord Verney, into whose ruminations was ever trickling, through a secret duct, this fine stream of distilled gall, brighter in spirits, or happier in temper.

Oh! vanity of human wishes! Not that the things we wish for are not in themselves pleasant, but that we forget that, as in nature every substance has its peculiar animalcule and infestings, so every blessing has, too minute to be seen at a distance, but quite inseparable, its parasite troubles.

Cleve Verney, too, who stood so near the throne, was he happy? The shadow of care was cast upon him. He had grown an anxious man. "Verney's looking awfully thin, don't you think, and seedy, and he's always writing long letters, and rather cross?" was the criticism of one of his club friends. "Been going a little too fast, I dare say."

Honest Tom Sedley thought it was this pending peerage business, and the suspense, and reported to his friend the confident talk of the town, on the subject. But when the question was settled, with a brilliant facility, his good humour did not recover. There was still the same cloud over his friend, and Tom began to fear that Cleve had got into some very bad scrape, probably with the Hebrew community.

CHAPTER XL.

MR. CLEVE VERNEY PAYS A VISIT TO ROSEMARY COURT.

THAT evoked spirit, Dingwell, was now *functus officio*, and might be dismissed. He was as much afraid of the light of London—even the gaslight—as a man of his audacity could be of anything. Still he lingered there.

Mr. Larkin had repeatedly congratulated the Verney peer, and his young friend and patron, Cleve, upon his own masterly management, and the happy result of the case, as he called it. And although, with scriptural warning before him, he would be the last man in the world to say, "Is not this great Babylon that I have builded?" Yet he did wish Lord Viscount Verney, and Cleve Verney, M.P., distinctly to understand that *he*, Mr Larkin, had been the making of them. There were some things—very many things, in fact, all desirable—which those distinguished persons could effect for the good attorney of Gylingden, and that excellent person in consequence presented himself diligently at Verney House.

On the morning I now speak of, he was introduced to the library, where he found the peer and his nephew.

"I ventured, my lord, to call—how do you do Mr. Verney?—to invite your lordship's attention to the position of Mr. Dingwell, who is compelled by lack of funds to prolong his stay in London. He is, I may say, most anxious to take his departure quietly and expeditiously, for Constantinople, where, I venture to think, it is expedient for all parties,

that his residence should be fixed, rather than in London, where he is in hourly danger of detection and arrest, the consequence of which, my lord—it will probably have struck your lordship's rapid apprehension already—would be, I venture to think, a very painful investigation of his past life, and a concomitant discrediting of his character, which although, as your lordship would point out to me, it cannot disturb that which is already settled, would yet produce an unpleasant effect out of doors, which, it is to be feared, he would take care to aggravate by all means in his power, were he to refer his detention here, and consequent arrest, to any fancied economy on your lordship's part."

"I don't quite follow you about it, Mr. Larkin," said Lord Verney, who generally looked a little stern when he was puzzled. "I don't quite apprehend the drift—be good enough to sit down—about it—of your remarks, as they bear upon Mr. Dingwell's wishes, and my conduct. Do *you*, Cleve?"

"I conjecture that Dingwell wants more money, and can't be got out of London without it," said Cleve.

"Eh? Well, that *did* occur to me—of *course*, that's plain enough—about it—and *what* a man that must be!—and—God bless me! about it—all the money he has got from me! It's incredible, Mr.—a—*Larkin*, three hundred pounds, you know, and he wanted *five*, and that absurdly enormous weekly payment, besides!"

"Your lordship has exactly, as usual, touched the point, and anticipated, with your wonted accuracy, the line at the other side, and indeed I may also say, all that may be urged by way of argument, *pro* and *con*. It is a wonderful faculty!" added Mr. Larkin, looking down with a contemplative smile, and a little wondering shake of the head.

"Ha, ha! Something of the same sort has been remarked in our family about it," said the Viscount, much pleased. "It facilitates business—rather, I should hope—about it."

The attorney shook his head, reflectively, raising his hands, and said, "No one but a professional man can have an *idea!*"

"And what do you suggest?" asked Cleve, who was perhaps a little tired of the attorney's compliments.

"Yes, what do you suggest, Mr.—Mr. *Larkin?* Your suggestion I should be prepared to consider. Anything, Mr. Larkin, suggested by you *shall* be considered," said Lord Verney, grandly, leaning back in his chair, and folding his hands.

"I am much—very much—flattered by your lordship's confidence. The former money, I have reason to think, my lord, went to satisfy an old debt, and I have reason to *know* that his den has been discovered by another creditor, from whom, even were funds at his disposal to leave England to-night, escape would be difficult, if not impossible."

"How much money does he want?" asked Mr. Cleve Verney.

"A *moment*, a *moment*, please. I was going to say," said Lord Verney, "if he wants money—about it—it would be desirable to state the amount."

Mr. Larkin, thus called on, cleared his voice, and his dove-like eyes contracted, and assumed their rat-like look, and he said, watching Lord Verney's face—

"I am afraid, my lord, that less than three hundred"——

Lord Verney contracted his brows, and nodded, after a moment.

"Three hundred pounds. Less, I say, my lord, will not satisfy the creditor, and there will remain something still in order to bring him back, and to keep him quiet there for a time; and I think, my lord, if you will go the length of *five* hundred"——

"'Gad, it's growing quite serious, Mr.—Mr. *Sir*, I confess I don't half understand this *person*, Mr. Dong-Ding—whatever it is—it's going rather too *fast* about it. I—I—and that's my clear opinion"—and Lord Verney gazed and blinked sternly at the attorney, and patted his fragrant pocket handkerchief several times to his mouth—"very unreasonable and monstrous, and, considering all I've done, very *ungrateful.*"

"Quite so, my lord; monstrously ungrateful. I can't describe to your lordship the trouble I have had with that extraordinary and, I fear I must add, fiendish person. I allude, of course, my lord, in my privileged character as having the honour of

confidential relations with your lordship, to that unfortunate man, Dingwell. I assure you, on one occasion, he seized a poker in his lodgings, and threatened to dash my brains out."

"Very good, sir," said Lord Verney, whose mind was busy upon quite another point; "and suppose I *do*, what do we gain, I ask, by assisting him?"

"Simply, my lord, he is so incredibly reckless, and, as I have said, *fiendish*, that if he were disappointed, I do think he will stick at nothing, even to the length of swearing that his evidence for your lordship was *perjured*, for the purpose of being revenged, and your generosity to him pending the inquiry, or rather the preparation of proofs, would give a colour unfortunately even to that monstrous allegation. Your lordship can have no idea—the elevation of your own mind prevents it—of the desperate character with whom we have had to deal."

"Upon my life, sir, a pleasant position you seem to have brought me into," said Lord Verney, flushing a good deal.

"My lord, it was inevitable," said Mr. Larkin, sadly.

"I don't think he could have helped it, really," said Cleve Verney.

"And who says he could?" asked Lord Verney, tartly. "I've all along said it could not well be helped, and that's the reason I *did* it, don't you see? but I may be allowed to say, I suppose, that the position is a most *untoward* one; and so it is, egad!" and Lord Verney got up in his fidget, and walked over to the window, and to the chimney-piece, and to the table, and fiddled with a great many things.

"I remember my late brother, Shadwell Verney—he's dead, poor Shadwell—had a world of trouble with a fellow—about it—who used to extort money from him—something I suppose, like this Mr. Ringwood—or I mean—you know his name—till he called in the police, and put an end to it."

"Quite true, my lord, quite true; but don't you think, my lord, such a line with Mr. Dingwell might lead to a fracays, and the possible unpleasantness to which *I* ventured to allude? *You* have seen him, Mr. Verney?"

"Yes; he's a beast, he really *is*; a little bit mad, I almost think."

"A little bit mad, precisely so; it really is, my lord, most melancholy. And I am so clearly of opinion that if we quarrel definitively with Mr. Dingwell, we may find ourselves in an extremely difficult position, that were the case my own, I should have no hesitation in satisfying Mr. Dingwell, even at a sacrifice, rather than incur the annoyance I anticipate. If you allow me, my lord, to conduct the matter with Mr. Dingwell, I think I shall succeed in getting him away quietly."

"It seems to me a very serious sum, Mr. Larkin," said Lord Verney.

"Precisely so, my lord; serious—very serious; but your lordship made a remark once in my hearing which impressed me powerfully: it was to the effect that where an object is to be accomplished, it is better to expend a little too much power, than anything too little." I think that Mr. Larkin invented this remark of Lord Verney's, which, however, his lordship was pleased to recognise, notwithstanding.

So the attorney took his departure, to call again next day.

"Clever man that Mr.—Mr. Larkin—vastly clever," said Lord Verney. "I rather think there's a great deal in what he says—it's very disgusting—about it; but one must consider, you know—there's no harm in considering—and—and that Mr. Ding—Dong—Dingleton, isn't it?—about it—a most offensive person. I must consider. I shall think it over, and give him my ideas to-morrow."

Cleve did not like an expression which had struck him in the attorney's face that day, and he proposed next day to write to Mr. Dingwell, and actually did so, requesting that he would be so good as to call at Verney House.

Mr. Dingwell did not come, but a note came by post, saying that the writer, Mr. Dingwell, was not well enough to venture a call.

What I term Mr. Larkin's rat-like eyes, and a certain dark and even wicked look that crosses the attorney's face, when they appear, had left a profound sense of uncertainty in Cleve's mind respecting that gentleman's character and plans. It was simply a conviction that the attor-

ney meditated something odd about Mr. Dingwell, and that no good man could look as he had looked.

There was no use in opening his suspicion, grounded on so slight a thing as a look, to his uncle, who though often timid and hesitating, and in secret helpless, and at his wits' end for aid in arriving at a decision, was yet, in matters where a vanity was concerned, or a strong prejudice or caprice involved, often incredibly obstinate.

Mr. Larkin's look teased Cleve. Larkin might grow into an influence very important to that young gentleman, and was not lightly to be quarrelled with. He would not quarrel with him; but he would see Dingwell, if indeed that person were still in London; a fact about which he had begun to have some odd misgivings. The note was written in a straight, cramp hand, and Mr. Larkin's face was in the background always. He knew Mr. Dingwell's address; an answer, real or forged, had reached him from it. So, full of dark dreams and conjectures, he got into a cab, and drove to the entrance of Rosemary Court, and knocked at Miss Sarah Rumble's door.

That good lady, from the shadow, looked suspiciously on him.

"Is Mr. Dingwell at home?"

"Mr. Dingwell, sir?" she repeated.

"Yes. Is he at home?"

"Mr. Dingwell, sir? *No*, sir."

"Does not Mr. Dingwell live here?"

"There *was* a gentleman, please, sir, with a name like that. Go *back*, child," she said sharply to Lucy Maria, who was peeping in the background, and who might not be edified, perhaps, by the dialogue. "Beg parding, sir," she continued, as the child disappeared; "they *are* so tiresome! There was an old gentleman lodging here, sir, please, which his name was like that, I do remember."

Cleve Verney did not know what to think.

"Is there anyone in the house who knows Mr. Dingwell? I've come to be of use to him; perhaps he could see me. Will you say Mr. Verney?"

"Mr.—*what*, sir, please?"

"Verney—here's my card; perhaps it is better."

As the conversation continued, Miss Rumble had gradually come more and more forward, closing the door more and more as she did so, so that she now confronted Cleve upon the step, and could have shut the door at her back, had he made any attempt to get in; and she called over her shoulder to Lucy Maria, and whispered something, and gave her, I suppose, the card; and in a minute more Miss Rumble opened the door wide, and showed "the gentleman" up stairs, and told him on the lobby she hoped he would not be offended, but that she had such positive orders as to leave her no choice; and that in fact Mr. Dingwell was in the drawing-room, and would be happy to see him, and almost at the same moment she threw open the door and introduced him, with a little courtesy, and—

"This way, please sir; here's the gentleman, please sir."

There he *did* find Mr. Dingwell, smoking a cigar, in his fez, slippers, and pea-green silk dressing-gown, with a cup of black coffee on the little table beside him, his *Times* and a few magazines there also. He looked in vulgar parlance "seedy," like an old fellow who had been raking the night before, and was wofully tired, and in no very genial temper.

"Will you excuse an old fellow, Mr. Verney, and take a chair for yourself? I'm not very well to-day. I suppose, from your note, you thought I had quitted London. It was not to be expected so old a plant should take root; but it's sometimes not worth moving 'em again, and they remain where they are, to wither—ha, ha, ha!"

"I should be sorry it was for any such purpose; but I am happy to find you still here, for I was really anxious to call and thank you."

"*Anxious*—to *thank me!* Are you really *serious*, Mr. Verney?" said Dingwell, lowering his cigar again, and looking with a stern smile in his visitor's face.

"Yes, sir; I *did* wish to call and thank you," said Cleve, determined not to grow angry; "and I *am* here to say that we are very much obliged."

"*We?*"

"Yes; my uncle and I."

"Oh! yes; well, it *is* something. I hope the coronet becomes him, and his robes. I venture to say he has got up the masquerading properties already; it's a pity there isn't a coronation or something at hand; and I suppose he'll put up a monument to

my dear friend Arthur—a mangy old dog he was, you'll allow me to say, though he was my friend, and very kind to me; and I, the most grateful fellow he ever met; I've been more grieved about him than any other person I can remember, upon my soul and honour,—and a devilish dirty dog he was."

This last reflection was delivered in a melancholy aside, after the manner of a soliloquy, and Cleve did not exactly know how to take this old fellow's impertinence.

"Arthur Verney—poor fellow! your uncle. He had a great deal of the pride of his family, you know, along with utter degradation. Filthy dog! —pah!" And Mr. Dingwell lifted both his hands, and actually used that unpleasant instrument called a "spittoon," which is seen in taverns, to give expression, it seemed, to his disgust.

"But he had his pride, dear Arthur; yes, he was proud, and wished for a tombstone. When he was dying he said, 'I should like a monument—not of course in a cathedral, for I have been living so darkly, and a good deal talked about; but there's an old church or abbey near Malory (that I'm sure was the name of the place) where our family has been accustomed to bury its quiet respectabilities and its *mauvais sujets;* and I think they might give me a pretty little monument there, quite quietly.' I think you'll do it, for you're a grateful person, and like thanking people; and he certainly did a great deal for his family by going out of it, and the little vanity of a monument would not cost much, and, as he said himself, no one would ever see it; and I promised, if I ever had an opportunity to mention the subject to your uncle."

Cleve bowed.

"'And,' said he, 'there will be a little conflict of feeling. I am sure they'd like the *monument*, but they would not make an ostentation of *me*. But remind them of my Aunt Deborah. Poor old girl! she ran away with a fiddler.' Egad, sir, these were his very words, and I've found, on inquiring here, they were quite true. She ran away with a fiddler—egad! and I don't know how many little fiddlers she had; and, by Jove, he said if I came back I should recognise a possible cousin in every street-fiddler I met with, for music is a talent that runs in families. And so, when Atropos cut his fiddlestring, and he died, she took, he said, to selling mutton pies, for her maintenance, in Chester, and being properly proud as a Verney, though as a fiddler's widow necessitous, he said she used to cry, behind her little table, 'Hot mutton pies!' and then, *sotto voce*, 'I hope nobody hears me;' and you may rely upon that family anecdote, for I had it from the lips of that notorious member of your family, your uncle Arthur, and he hoped that they would comply with the tradition, and reconcile the Verney pride with Verney exigencies, and concede him the secret celebration of a monument."

"If you are serious?"——

"Serious about a monument, sir! who the devil could be lively on such a subject?" and Mr. Dingwell looked unaccountably angry, and ground his teeth, and grew white. "A monument, cheap and nasty, I dare say; it isn't much for a poor devil from whom you've got everything. I suppose you'll speak to your uncle, sir?"

"I'll speak to him, sir."

"Yes, *do*, pray, and prevail. I'm not very strong, sir, and there's something that remains for you and me to do, sir."

"What is that?"

"To rot under ground, sir; and as I shall go first, it would be pleasant to me to be able to present your affectionate regards to your uncle, when I meet him, and tell him that you had complied with his little fancy about the monument, as he seemed to make a point that his name should not be blotted totally from the records of his family."

Cleve was rather confirmed in his suspicions about the sanity of this odious old man—as well he might—and, at all events, was resolved to endure him without a row.

"I shall certainly remember, and mention all you have said, sir," said Cleve.

"Yes," said the old man, in a grim meditation, looking down, and he chucked away the stump of his cigar. "It's a devilish hard case, Kismet!" he muttered.

"I suppose you find our London climate very different from that you have grown accustomed to?" said Cleve, approaching the point on which he desired some light.

"I lived in London for a long time, sir. I was—as perhaps you know—junior partner in the great Greek house of Prinkipi and Dingwell—d——n Prinkipi! say I. He ran us into trouble sir; then came a smash, sir, and Prinkipi levanted, making a scapegoat of me, the most vilified and persecuted Greek merchant that ever came on 'Change! And, egad! if they could catch me, even now, I believe they'd bury me in a dungeon for the rest of my days, which, in that case, would not be many. I'm here, therefore, I may say, at the risk of my life."

"A very anxious situation, indeed, Mr. Dingwell; and I conclude you intend but a short stay here?"

"Quite the contrary, sir. I mean to stay as long as I please, and that may be as long as I live."

"Oh! I had thought from something that Mr. Larkin said," began Cleve Verney.

"Larkin! He's a religious man, and does not put his candle under a bushel. He's very particular to say his prayers; and provided he says *them*, he takes leave to say what he likes beside."

Mr. Dingwell was shooting his arrows as freely as Cupid does; but Cleve did not take this satire for more than its worth.

"He may think it natural I should wish to be gone, and so I do," continued the old man setting down his coffee cup, "if I could get away without the trouble of going, or was sure of a tolerably comfortable berth, at my journey's end; but I'm old, and travelling shakes me to pieces, and I have enemies elsewhere, as well as here; and the newspapers have been printing sketches of my life and adventures, and poking up attention about me, and awakening the slumbering recollection of persons by whom I had been, in effect, forgotten, *every*-where. No rest for the wicked, sir. I'm pursued; and, in fact, what little peace I might have enjoyed in this, the closing period of my life, has been irreparably wrecked by my visit and public appearance here, to place your uncle, and by consequence *you*, in the position now secured to you. What do you think of me?"

"I think, sir, you have done us a great service; and I know we are very much obliged," said Cleve, with his most engaging smile.

"And do you know what I think of myself? I think I'm a d——d fool, unless I look for some advantage to myself."

"Don't you think, sir, you have found it, on the whole, advantageous, your coming here?" insinuated Cleve.

"Barren, sir, as a voyage on the Dead Sea. The test is this—what have I by it? not five pounds, sir, in the world. Now, I've opened my mind a little to you upon this subject, and I'm of the same mind still; and if I've opened Alladdin's garden to you, with its fruitage of emeralds, rubies, and so forth, I expect to fill my snuff-box with the filings and chippings of your gigantic jewellery."

Cleve half repented his visit, now that the presence of the insatiable Mr. Dingwell, and his evident appetite for more money, had justified the representations of the suspected attorney.

"I shall speak to Mr. Larkin on the subject," said Cleve Verney.

"D——n Larkin, sir! speak to me."

"But, Mr. Dingwell, I have really, as I told you before, no authority to speak; and no one has the least power in the matter but my uncle."

"And what the devil did you come here for?" demanded Mr. Dingwell, suddenly blazing up into one of his unaccountable furies; "I suppose you expected me to congratulate you on your success, and to ask leave to see your uncle in his coronet—ha, ha, ha! —or his cap and bells, or whatever he wears. By —— sir, I hope he holds his head high, and struts like a peacock, and has pleasant dreams; time enough for nightmares, sir, hereafter, eh? Uneasy rests the head that wears the crown! Good evening, sir; I'll talk to Mr. Larkin."

And with these words Mr. Dingwell got up, looking unaccountably angry, and made a half-sarcastic, half-furious bow, wherewith he dismissed Mr. Cleve Verney, with more distinct convictions than ever that the old gentleman was an unmitigated beast.

CHAPTER XLI.

IN LORD VERNEY'S LIBRARY.

Who should light upon Cleve that evening as he walked homeward but our friend Tom Sedley, who was struck by the anxious pallor and melancholy of his face.

Good-natured Sedley took his arm, and said he, as they walked on together—

"Why don't you smile on your luck, Cleve?"

"How do you know what my luck is?"

"All the world knows that pretty well."

"All the world knows everything but its own business."

"Well, people do say that your uncle has lately got the oldest peerage—one of them—in England, and an estate of thirty-three thousand a year, for one thing, and that you are heir-presumptive to those trifles."

"And that heirs-presumptive often get nothing but their heads in their hands."

"No, you'll not come Saint Denis nor any other martyr over us, my dear boy; we know very well how you stand in that quarter."

"It's pleasant to have one's domestic relations so happily arranged by such very competent persons. I'm much obliged to all the world for the parental interest it takes in my private concerns."

"And it also strikes some people that a perfectly safe seat in the House of Commons is not to be had for nothing by every fellow who wishes it."

"But suppose I *don't* wish it."

"Oh! we may suppose anything."

Tom Sedley laughed as he said this, and Cleve looked at him sharply, but saw no uncomfortable meaning in his face.

"There is no good in talking of what one has not tried," said he. "If you had to go down to that tiresome House of Commons every time it sits; and had an uncle like mine to take you to task every time you missed a division—you'd soon be as tired of it as I am."

"I see, my dear fellow, you are bowed down under a load of good luck." They were at the door of Tom Sedley's lodgings by this time, and opening it, he continued, "I've something in my room to show you; just run up with me for a minute, and you'll say I'm a conjuror."

Cleve, not to be got into good spirits that evening, followed him upstairs, thinking of something else.

"I've got a key to your melancholy, Cleve," said he, leading the way into his drawingroom. "Look *there*," and he pointed to a clever copy in crayons of the famous Beatrice Cenci, which he had hung over his chimney-piece.

Tom Sedley laughed, looking in Cleve's eyes. A slight flush had suddenly tinged his visiter's face, as he saw the portrait. But he did not seem to enjoy the joke, on the contrary, he looked a little embarrassed and angry. "That's Guido's portrait—well, what about it?" he asked, rather surlily.

"Yes, of course; but who is it like?"

"Very few, I dare say, for *it* is very pretty; and except on canvass, there is hardly such a thing as a pretty girl to be seen. Is that all? for the life of me, I can't see where the conjuring lies."

"Not in the picture, but the *likeness*; don't you see it?"

"*No*," said Cleve; "I must go; are you coming?"

"Not see it!" said Tom. "Why if it were painted for her, it could not be more like. Why, it's the Flower of Cardyllian, the Star of Malory. It is *your* Miss Fanshawe—*my* Margaret—*our* Miss Margaret Fanshawe. I'm making the fairest division I can, you see; and I would not be without it for all the world."

"She would be very much gratified if she heard it. It is so flattering to a young lady to have a fellow buy a coloured lithograph, and call it by her name, and crack jokes and spout mock heroics over it. It is the modern way of celebrating a lady's name. Don't you seriously think, Tom Sedley, it would be better to smash it with a poker, and throw it into the fire, than go on taking such liberties with any young lady's name?"

"Upon my honour, Cleve, you mis-

take me; you do me great injustice. You used to laugh at me, you know, when I'm quite sure, thinking over it now, you were awfully gone about her yourself. I never told any one but you why I bought that picture; it isn't a lithograph, but painted, or drawn, or whatever they call it, with chalks, and it cost five guineas; and no one but you ever heard me mention Miss Fanshawe's name, except the people at Cardyllian, and then only as I might mention any other, and always with respect."

"What does it signify?" interrupted Cleve, in the middle of a forced yawn. "I'm tired to-day, and cross—don't you see; and man delights not me, nor woman neither. So if you're coming, come, for I must go."

"And really, Cleve, the Cardyllian people do say (I've had letters) that you were awfully in love with her yourself, and always haunting those woods of Malory while she was there, and went away immediately she left, and have never been seen in Cardyllian since."

"Those Cretans were always liars, Tom Sedley. That comes direct from the Club. I can fancy old Shrapnel in the light of the bow-window, composing his farrago of dreams, and lies, and chuckling and cackling over it."

"Well, I don't say that Shrapnel had anything to do with it, but I did hear at first they thought you were gone about little Agnes Ethenage."

"Oh! they found that out—did they?" said Cleve. "But you know those people—I mean the Cardyllian people—as well, or better than I, and really, as a kindness to me, and to save me the trouble of endless explanations to my uncle, I would be so much obliged if you would not repeat their follies—unless, of course, you happen to believe them."

Cleve did not look more cheerful as he drove away in a cab which he took to get rid of his friend Tom Sedley. It was mortifying to find how vain were his clever stratagems, and how the rustic chapmen of that Welsh village and their wives had penetrated his diplomacy. He thought he had killed the rumours about Malory, and yet that grain of mustard seed had grown while his eye was off it, with a gigantic luxuriance, and now was large enough to form a feature in the landscape, and quite visible from the windows of Ware—if his uncle should happen to visit that mansion—overtopping the roofs and chimneys of Cardyllian. His uncle meditated an early visit to Cardyllian, and a short stay at Ware, before the painters and gilders got possession of the house; a sort of ovation in demi-toilette, grand and friendly, and a foretaste of the splendours that were coming. Cleve did hope that those beasts would be quiet while Lord Verney was (as he in his grand manner termed it) "among them." He knew the danger of a vague suspicion seizing on his mind, how fast it clung, how it fermented like yeast, fantastic and obstinate as a foolish woman's jealousy; and as men sometimes will, he even magnified this danger. Altogether, Cleve was not causelessly anxious and alarmed. He had in the dark to navigate a channel which even in broad daylight tasked a good steersman.

When Cleve reached Verney House it was eight o'clock. His lordship had ordered his brougham at half-past, and was going down to the House; he had something to say on Lord Frompington's bill. It was not very new, nor very deep, nor very much; but he had been close at it for the last three weeks. He had amused many gentlemen—and sometimes even ladies—at many dinner parties with a very exact recital of his views. I cannot say they were precisely *his*, for they were culled, perhaps unconsciously, from a variety of magazine articles and pamphlets, which happened to take Lord Verney's view of the question.

It is not given to any mortal to have his heart's desire in everything. Lord Verney had a great deal of this world's good things, wealth, family, rank. But he chose to aim at official station, and here his stars denied him.

Some people thought him a goose, and some only a bore. He was, as we know, pompous, conceited, obstinate, also weak and dry. His grandfather had been a cabinet minister, respectable and silent, and was not he wiser, brighter, and more learned than his grandfather? "Why on earth should not *he?*" His influence commanded two boroughs, and virtually two counties. The minister, therefore, treated him with distinc-

tion; and spoke of him confidentially as horribly foolish, impracticable, and at times positively impertinent.

Lord Verney was subject to small pets and huffs, and sometimes was affronted with the Premier for four or five weeks together, although the fact escaped his notice. And when the viscount relented, he would make him a visit to quiet his mind, and show him that friendly relations were re-established; and the minister would say, "Here comes that d——d Verney; I suppose I must give him half-an-hour!" And when the peer departed, thinking he had made the minister happy, the minister was seriously debating whether Lord Verney's boroughs were worth the price of Lord Verney's society.

His lordship was now in that sacred apartment, his library; where not even Cleve had a right to disturb him uninvited. Preliminaries, however, were now arranged; the servant announced him, and Cleve was commanded to enter.

"I have just had a line to say I shall be in time at half-past ten o'clock, about it. Frompington's bill won't be on till then; and take that chair and sit down, about it, won't you? I've a good many things on my mind; people put things upon me. *Some* people think I have a turn for business, and they ask me to consider and direct matters about *theirs*, and I do what I can. There was poor Wimbledon, who died, about it, seven years ago. You remember Wimbledon—or—I say—you either remember him or you don't remember him; but in either case it's of no importance. Let me see: Lady Wimbledon—she's connected with you, about it—your mother, remotely—remotely also with us, the Verneys. I've had a world of trouble about her settlements—I can't describe—I can't describe—I was not well advised, in fact, to accept the trust at all. Long ago, when poor Frompington—I mean Wimbledon, of course—have I been saying Wimbledon?"

Cleve at once satisfied him.

"Yes, of course. When poor Wimbledon looked as healthy and as strong as I do at this moment, about it—a long time ago. Poor Wimbledon!—he fancied, I suppose, I had some little turn, about it, for business—*some* of my friends *do*—and I accepted the trust when poor Wimbledon looked as little likely to be hurried into eternity, about it, as I do. I had a regard for him, poor Wimbledon, and he had a respect for me, and thought I could be of use to him after he was dead, and I have endeavoured, and people think I *have*. But Lady Wimbledon, the dowager, poor woman. She's very long-winded, poor soul, and gives me an infinity of trouble. One can't say to a lady, 'You are detaining me; you are beating about the bush; you fail to come to the point.' It would be taking a liberty, or something, about it. I had not seen Lady Wimbledon, simple 'oman, for seven years or more. It's a very entangled business, and I confess it seems rather unfair. I should have my time already sufficiently occupied with other, and as I think, more important affairs, so seriously interrupted and abridged. There's going to be a bill filed—yes, and a great deal of annoyance. She has one unmarried daughter, Caroline, about it, who is not to have any power over her money till she is thirty-one. She's not that now. It was hardly fair to me, putting it in trust so long. She is a very superior person—a young woman one does not meet with every day, about it; and—and very apprehensive—a great deal of mind—quite unusual. Do you know her?"

The viscount raised his eyes toward the ceiling with a smile that was mysterious and pleased.

Cleve did know that young lady of eight-and-twenty, and her dowager mamma, "simple 'oman," who had pursued him with extraordinary spirit and tenacity for several years, but that was past and over. Cleve experienced a thrill of pain at his heart. He suspected that the old torturing idea was again active in his uncle's mind.

"Yes, he *did* know them—ridiculous old woman; and the girl—he believed she'd marry any one; he fancied she would have done *him* that honour at one time, and he fancied that the trust, if it was to end when she was thirty-one, must have expired long ago."

"My dear Cleve, don't you think that's rather an odd way of speaking of a young lady? People used not in my time—that is, when I was a young man of two or three-and-

twenty, about it—to talk so of young ladies. It was not considered a thing that ought to be done. I—I never heard a word of the kind."

Lord Verney's chivalry had actually called a little pink flush to his old cheeks, and he looked very seriously still at the cornice, and tapped a little nervous tattoo with his pencil-case on the table as he did so.

"I really did not mean—I only meant—in fact, uncle, I tell *you* everything; and poor Caroline is *so* much elder than I, it always struck me as amusing."

"Their man of business in matters of law is Mr. Larkington, about it. *Owr* man, you know—you know him?"

"Oh, yes. They could not do better. Mr. Larkin—a very shrewd fellow. I went, by-the-bye, to see that old man, Dingwell."

"Ah, well, very good. We'll talk of that by-and-by, if you please; but it has been occurring to my mind, Cleve, that—that you should look about you. In fact, if you don't like one young lady, you may like another. It strikes me I never saw a greater number of pretty young women, about it, than there are at present in town. I do assure you, at that ball—where was it?—the place I saw you, and sent you down to the division—don't you remember?—and next day, I told you, I think, they never said so much as 'thank you' for what I had done, though it was the saving of them, about it. I say I was quite struck; the spectacle was quite charming, about it, from no other cause; and you know there is Ethel—I always said Ethel—and there *can* be no objection there; and I have distinct reasons for wishing you to be well connected, about it—in a political sense—and there is no harm in a little *money;* and, in fact, I have made up my mind, my dear Cleve, it is indispensable, and you *must* marry. I'm quite clear upon the point."

"I can promise you, my dear uncle, that I shan't marry without your approbation."

"Well, I rather took that for granted," observed Lord Verney, with dry solemnity.

"Of course. I only say it's very difficult sometimes to see what's wisest. I have you, I know, uncle, to direct me; but you must allow I have also your example. You relied entirely upon yourself for your political position. You made it without the aid of any such step, and I should be only too proud to follow your example."

"A—yes—but the cases are different; there's a difference, about it. As I said in the debate on the Jewish Disabilities, there are no two cases, about it, precisely parallel; and I've given my serious consideration to the subject, and I am satisfied that for every reason you ought to choose a wife *immediately;* there's *no* reason against it, and you ought to choose a wife, about it, immediately; and my mind is made up quite decidedly, and I have spoken repeatedly; but now I tell you I recognise no reason for further delay—no reason against the step, and every reason for it; and in short, I shall have no choice but to treat any dilatory procedure in the matter as amounting to a distinct trifling with my known wishes, desire, and opinion."

And the Right Hon. Lord Viscount Verney smote his thin hand emphatically at these words, upon the table, as he used to do in his place in the House.

Then followed an impressive silence, the peer holding his head high, and looking a little flushed; and Cleve very pale, with the ghost of the smile he had worn a few minutes before.

There are instruments that detect and measure with a beautiful accuracy, the presence and force of invisible influences — heat, electricity, air, moisture. If among all these "meters"—electronometers, hygrometers, anemometers—*odynometer*, to detect the presence and measure the intensity of hidden *pain*, were procurable, and applied to the breast of that pale, smiling young man at that moment, I wonder to what degree in its scale its index would have pointed!

Cleve intended to make some slight and playful remark, he knew not what, but his voice failed him.

He had been thinking of this possibility—of this *hour*—for many a day, as some men will of the day of judgment, and putting it aside as a hateful thought, possibly never to be embodied in *fact*, and here it was come upon him, suddenly, inevitably, in all its terrors.

"Well, certainly, uncle,—as you wish it. I must look about me—seriously. I know you wish me to

be happy. I'm very grateful, you have always bestowed so much of your thought and care upon me—*too* good, a great deal."

So spoke the young man—white as that sheet of paper on which his uncle had been pencilling two or three of what he called his thoughts—and almost as unconscious of the import of the words he repeated.

"I'm glad, my dear Cleve, you are sensible that I have been, I may say, kind; and now let me say that I think Ethel has a great deal in her favour; there are others, however, I am well aware, and there is time to look about, but I should wish something settled *this* season—in fact, before we break up, about it; in short I have, as I said, made up my mind. I don't act without reasons; I never do, and mine are conclusive; and it was on this topic, my dear Cleve, I wished to see you. And now I think you may wish to have some dinner. I'm afraid I've detained you here rather long."

And Lord Verney rose, and moved toward a book-case with Hansard in it, to signify that the conference was ended, and that he desired to be alone in his study.

CHAPTER XLII.

AN OVATION.

Cleve had no dinner; he had supped full of horrors. He got on his coat and hat, and appeared nowhere that evening, but took an immense walk instead, in the hope I dare say of tiring out his agony—perhaps simply because quietude and the faculty of uninterrupted thought were unendurable.

Next day hope began a little to revive. An inventive mind is inexhaustible; and are not the resources of delay always considerable?

Who could have been acting upon his uncle's mind in this matter? The spring of Lord Verney's action was seldom quite within himself. All at once he recollected that he had come suddenly upon what seemed an unusually secret conference between his uncle and Mr. Larkin about ten days since; it was in the library. He was sure the conversation had some reference to him. His uncle looked both annoyed and embarrassed when he came into the room; even the practised countenance of Mr. Larkin betrayed some faint signs of confusion.

Larkin he knew had been down in the neighbourhood of Ware, and probably in Cardyllian. Had anything reached him about the Malory romance? Mr. Larkin was a man who would not stick at trifles in hunting up evidence, and all that concerned *him* would now interest Mr. Larkin, and Cleve had too high an opinion of that gentleman's sagacity not to assume that if he had obtained the clew to his mystery he would make capital of the secret with Lord Verney. *Viscera magnorum domuum*—nothing like secret relations—confidences,—and what might not come of this? Of course, the first result would be a peremptory order on which Lord Verney had spoken last night. The only safety for the young man, it will be concluded, is to marry him suitably forthwith.

And—by Jove!—a flash of light! He had it! The whole thing was clear now. Yes; *he* was to be married to Caroline Oldys, because Mr. Larkin was the professional right hand of that family, and so the attorney would glide ultimately into the absolute command of the House of Verney!

To think of that indescribably vulgar rogue's actually shaping the fortunes and regulating the future suffering of Cleve Verney! How much of our miseries result from the folly of those who would serve us! Here was Viscount Verney with, as respected Cleve, the issues of life very much in his fingers, dropping through shear imbecility into the coarse hands of that odious attorney!

Cleve trembled with rage as he thought of the degradation to which that pompous fool, Lord Verney, was consigning him, yet what was to be done? Cleve was absolutely at the disposal of the peer, and the peer was unconsciously placing himself in the hands of Mr. Larkin, to be worked like a puppet, and spoken for by the Pharisaical attorney.

Cleve's theory hung together plausibly. It would have been gross folly to betray his jealousy of the attorney, whose opportunities with his uncle he had no means of limiting or interrupting, and against whom he had as yet no case.

He was gifted with a pretty talent for dissimulation; Mr. Larkin congratulated himself in secret upon Cleve's growing esteem and confidence. The young gentleman's manner was gracious and even friendly to a degree that was quite marked, and the unsuspecting attorney would have been startled had he learned on a sudden how much he hated him.

Ware—that great house which all across the estuary in which its princely front was reflected, made quite a feature in the landscape sketched by so many tourists, from the pier on the shingle of Cardyllian on bright summer days, was about to be re-habilitated, and very splendid doings were to follow.

In the mean time, before the architects and contractors, the plumbers, and painters, and carpenters, and carvers, and gilders had taken possession, and before those wonderful artists in stucco who were to encrust and overspread the ceilings with noble designs, rich and elegant and light, of fruit and flowers and cupids, and from memory, not having read the guide-book of Cardyllian and its vicinity for more than a year, I should be afraid to say what arabesques, and imagery beside, had entered with their cements and their scaffolding; and before the three brother artists had got their passports for England who were to paint on the panels of the doors such festive pieces as Watteau loved. In short, before the chaos and confusion that attend the throes of that sort of creation had set in, Lord Verney was to make a visit of a few days to Ware, and was to visit Cardyllian and to receive a congratulatory address from the corporation of that ancient town, and to inspect the gas-works (which I am glad to say are hid away in a little hollow), and the two fountains which supply the town—constructed, as the inscription tells, at the expense of "the Right Honorable Kyffin Fulke, Nineteenth Viscount Verney, and Twenty-ninth Baron Penruthyn, of Malory." What else his lordship was to see, and to do, and to say on the day of his visit the county and other newspapers round about printed when the spectacle was actually over, and the great doings matter of history.

There were arches of evergreens and artificial flowers of paper, among which were very tolerable hollyhocks, though the roses were starting, under these. Lord Viscount Verney and the "distinguished party" who accompanied him passed up Castle-street to the town-hall, where he was received by the mayor and town-councillors, accompanied and fortified by the town-clerk and other functionaries, all smiling except the mayor, on whom weighed the solemn responsibility of having to read the address, a composition, and no mean one, of the Rev. Doctor Splayfoot, who attended with parental anxiety "to see the little matter through," as he phrased it, and was so awfully engaged that Mrs. Splayfoot, who was on his arm, and asked him twice, in a whisper, whether the tall lady in purple silk was Lady Wimbledon, without receiving the slightest intimation that she was so much as heard, remarked testily that she hoped he would not write many more addresses, inasmuch as it made him ill-bred to that degree that if the town-hall had fallen during the reading, he never would have perceived it till he had shaken his ears in kingdom-come. Lord Verney read his answer, which there was much anxiety and pressure to hear.

"Now it really *was* be-autiful—*wasn't* it?" our friend Mrs. Jones the draper whispered, in particular reference to that part of it, in which the viscount invoked the blessing of the Almighty upon himself and his doings, gracefully admitting that in contravention of the Divine will and the decrees of heaven, even he could not be expected to accomplish much, though with the best intentions. And Captain Shrapnel, who felt that the sentiment was religious, and was anxious to be conspicuous, standing with his hat in his hand, with a sublime expression of countenance, said in an audible voice—"*Amen.*"

All this over, and the building inspected, the distinguished party were conducted by the mayor, the militia band accompanying their march—[air—"The Meeting of the Waters"]—

to the "Fountains" in Gannon's-lane, to which I have already alluded.

Here they were greeted by a detachment of the Llanwthyn Temperance Union, headed by short, fat Thomas Pritchard, the interesting apostle of total abstinence, who used to preach on the subject alternately in Welsh and English in all the towns who would hear his gospel, in most of which he was remembered as having been repeatedly fined for public intoxication, and known by the familiar pet-name of "Swipey Tom," before his remarkable conversion.

Mr. Pritchard now led the choir of the Llanwthyn Temperance Union, consisting of seven members, of various sizes, dressed in their Sunday costume, and standing in a row in front of fountain No. 1—each with his hat in his left hand and a tumbler of fair water in his right.

Good Mrs. Jones, who had a vague sense of fun, and remembered anecdotes of the principal figure in this imposing spectacle, did laugh a little modestly into her handkerchief, and answered the admonitory jog of her husband's elbow by pleading—"*Poor* fellows! Well, you know it *is* odd—there's no denying *that*, you *know*;" and from the background were heard some jeers from the excursionists who visited Cardyllian for that gala, which kept Hughes, the Cardyllian policeman, and Evans, the other "horney," who had been drafted from Lluinan, to help to overawe the turbulent, very hot and active during that part of the ceremony.

Particularly unruly was John Swillers, who, having failed as a publican in Liverpool, in consequence of his practice of drinking the greater part of his own stock in trade, had migrated to "The Golden Posts" in Church-street, Cardyllian, where he ceased to roll his barrel, set up his tressels, and had tabernacled for the present, drinking his usual proportion of his own liquors, and expecting the hour of a new migration.

Over the heads of the spectators and the admiring natives of Cardyllian were heard such exhortations as "Go it, Swipey," "There's gin in that," "Five shillin's for his vorship, Swipey," "I say, Swipey Tom, pay your score at the Golden Posts, will ye?" "Will ye go a bit on the stretcher, Swipey?" "Here's two horneys as 'll take ye home arter that."

And these interruptions, I am sorry to say, continued, notwithstanding the remonstrances which Mr. Hughes addressed almost pathetically to John Swillers of the Golden Posts, as a respectable citizen of Cardyllian, one from whose position the police were led to expect assistance and the populace an example. There was something in these expostulations which struck John Swillers, for he would look with a tipsy solemnity in Hughes's face while he delivered them, and once took his hand, rather affectionately, and said, "That's your sort." But invariably these unpleasant interpellations were resumed, and did not cease until this moral exhibition had ended with the last verse of the temperance song, chanted by the deputation with great vigour, in unison, and which, as the reader will perceive, had in it a Bacchanalian character, which struck even the gravest listeners as a hollow mockery:—

Refreshing more than sinful swipes,
  The weary man
  Who quaffs a can,
That sparkling foams through leaden pipes.

CHORUS.

  Let every man
  Then, fill his can,
  And fill the glass
  Of every lass
In brimming bumpers sparkling clear,
To pledge the health of Verney's Peer!

And then came a chill and ghastly "hip-hip, hurrah," and with some gracious inquiries on Lord Verney's part, as to the numbers, progress, and finances of "their interesting association," and a subscription of ten pounds, which Mr. John Swillers took leave to remark, "wouldn't be laid out on water, by *no* means," the viscount, with grand and radiant Mr. Larkin at his elbow, and frequently murmuring in his ear—to the infinite disgust of my friend, the Cardyllian attorney, thus out-strutted and out-crowed on his own rustic elevation—was winning golden opinions from all sorts of men.

The party went on, after the wonders of the town had been exhausted, to look at Malory, and thence returned to a collation, at which toasts were toasted and speeches spoken, and

Captain Shrapnel spoke, by arrangement, for the ladies of Cardyllian in his usual graceful and facetious manner, with all the puns and happy allusions which a month's private diligence, and, I am sorry to say, some shameless plagiarisms from three old numbers of poor Tom Hood's "Comic Annual," could get together, and the gallant captain concluded by observing that the noble lord whom they had that day the honour and happiness to congratulate, intended, he understood, everything that was splendid and liberal and handsome, and that the town of Cardyllian, in the full radiance of the meridian sunshine, whose golden splendour proceeded from the *south*—"The cardinal point at which the great house of Ware is visible from the Green of Cardyllian"—(hear, hear, and laughter)—"there remained but one grievance to be redressed, and that set to rights, every ground of complaint would slumber for ever, he might say, in the great bed of Ware"—(loud cheers and laughter)—"and what was that complaint? He was instructed by his fair, lovely, and beautiful clients—the ladies of Cardyllian—some of whom he saw in the gallery, and some still more happily situated at the festive board"—(a laugh). "Well, he was, he repeated, instructed by them to say that there was one obvious duty which the noble lord owed to his ancient name—to the fame of his public position—to the coronet, whose golden band encircled his distinguished brow—and above all, to the ancient feudal dependency of Cardyllian"—(hear, hear)—"and that was to select from his country's beauty, fascination, and accomplishment, and he might say loveliness, a partner worthy to share the ermine and the coronet and the name and the—the ermine (hear, hear) of the ancient house of Verney" (loud cheers); "and need he add that when the selection was made, it was hoped and trusted and aspired after, that the selection would not be made a hundred miles away from the ivied turrets, the feudal ruins, the gushing fountains, and the spacious town-hall of Cardyllian"—(loud and long-continued cheering, amid which the gallant captain, very hot, and red, and smiling furiously, sat down with a sort of lurch, and drank off a glass of champagne, and laughed and giggled a little in his chair while the "cheering and laughter" continued).

And Lord Verney rose, not at all hurt by this liberty, very much amused on the contrary, and in high good humour his lordship said—

"Allow me to say—I am sure you will"—(hear, hear, and cries of "We will")—"I say, I am sure you will permit me to say that the ladies of Cardyllian, a-a-about it, seem to me to have chosen a very eloquent spokesman in the gallant, and I have no doubt, distinguished officer who has just addressed the house. We have all been entertained by the eloquence of Captain Scollop"—[here the mayor deferentially whispered something to the noble orator]—"I beg pardon—Captain Grapnell—who sits at the table, with his glass of wine, about it—and very good wine it is—his glass, I say, where it should be, in his hand"—(hear, hear, and laughter, and "You got it there, captain.") "And I assure the gallant captain I did not mean to be severe—only we are all joking—and I do say that he has his hand—my gallant friend, Captain Grabblet, has it—where every gallant officer's ought to be, about it, and that is, upon his weapon"—(hear, hear, laughter, and cries of "His lordship's too strong for you, captain.") "I don't mean to hurt him, though, about it," (renewed cries of hear, and laughter), during which the captain shook his ears a little, smiling into his glass rather foolishly, as a man who was getting the worst of it, and knew it, but took it all pleasantly. "No, it would not be fair to the ladies, about it," (renewed laughter and cheering), "and all I *will* say is this, about it—there are parts of Captain Scraplet's speech, which I shan't undertake to answer at this moment. I feel that I am trespassing, about it, for a much longer time than I had intended," (loud cries of "No, no, Go on, go on," and cheering), during which the mayor whispered something to the noble lord, who, having heard it twice or thrice repeated, nodded to the mayor in evident apprehension, and when silence was restored proceeded to say, "I have just heard, without meaning to say anything unfair of the gallant captain, Captain Scalpel, that he is hardly himself qualified to give me

the excellent advice, about it, which I received from him; for they tell me that he has rather run away, about it, from his colours, on that occasion." (Great laughter and cheering). "I should be sorry to wound Captain Shat—Scat—Scrap, the gallant captain, to wound him, I say, even in front." (Laughter, cheering, and a voice from the gallery "Hit him hard, and he won't swell," "Order.") "But I think I was bound to make that observation in the interest of the ladies of Cardyllian, about it;" (renewed laughter); "and, for my part, I promise my gallant friend—my—captain—about it—that although I may take some time, like himself" (loud laughter); "yet although I cannot let fall, about it, any observation that may commit me, yet I do promise to meditate on the excellent advice he has been so good as to give me, about it." And the noble lord resumed his seat amid uproarious cheering and general laughter, wondering what had happened to put him in the vein, and regretting that some of the people of Downing-street had not been present to hear it, and witness its effect.

THE TENANTS OF MALORY.

BY J. S. LE FANU, AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XLIII.

OLD FRIENDS ON THE GREEN.

Tom Sedley saw the Etherage girls on the green, and instead of assisting as he had intended, at the great doings in the town, he walked over to have a talk with them.

People who know Cardyllian remember the two seats, partly stone, partly wood, which are placed on the green, near the margin of the sea—seats without backs—on which you can sit with equal comfort, facing the water and the distant mountains, or the white-fronted town and old Castle of Cardyllian. Looking toward this latter prospect, the ladies sat, interested, no doubt, though they preferred a distant view, in the unusual bustle of the quiet old place.

On one of these seats sat Charity and Agnes, and as he approached, smiling, up got Charity and walked some steps towards him; looking kindly, but not smiling, for that was not her wont, and with her thin hand, in dog-skin glove, extended to greet him.

"How are you, Thomas Sedley? when did you come?" asked Miss Charity, much gladder to see him than she appeared.

"I arrived this morning; you're all well, I hope;" he was looking at Agnes, and would have got away from Miss Charity, but that she held him still by the hand.

"All very well, thank you, except Agnes. I don't think she's very well. I have ever so much to tell you when you and I have a quiet opportunity, but not now,"—she was speaking in a low tone;—"and now go and ask Agnes how she is."

So he did. She smiled a little languidly he thought, and was not looking very strong, but prettier than ever—so *very* pretty! She blushed too, very brilliantly, as he approached; it would have been very flattering had he not seen Cleve Verney walking quickly over the green toward the Etherage group. For whom was the blush? Two gentlemen had fired simultaneously.

"Your bird? I rather think *my* bird?—isn't it?"

Now Tom Sedley did not think the bird his, and he felt, somehow, strangely vexed. And he got through his greeting uncomfortably; his mind was away with Cleve Verney, who was drawing quickly near.

"Oh! Mr. Verney, *what* a time it is since we saw you last!" exclaimed emphatic Miss Charity; "I really began to think you'd *never* come."

"Very good of you, Miss Etherage, to think about me."

"And you never gave me your subscription for our poor old woman, last winter!"

"Oh! my subscription? I'll give it now—what was it to be—a pound?"

"No, you promised only ten shillings, but it *ought* to be a pound. I think less would be *shameful*."

"Then, Miss Agnes, shall it be a pound?" he said, turning to her with a laugh—with his fingers in his purse, "whatever you say I'll do."

"*Agnes*—of *course*, a pound," said Charity, in her nursery style of admonition.

"Charity says it must be a pound," answered Agnes.

"And *you* say so?"

"Of course, I must."

"Then a pound it *is*—and mind," he added, laughing, and turning to Miss Charity with the coin in his fingers, "I'm to figure in your book of benefactors—your golden book of saints, or *martyrs*, rather; but you need not put down my name, only 'The old woman's friend,' or 'A lover of flannel,' or 'A promoter of petticoats,' or any other benevolent alias you think becoming."

"'The old woman's friend,' will do very nicely," said Charity gravely. "Thank you, Mr. Verney, and we were *so* glad to hear that your uncle has succeeded at last to the peerage.

He can be of such *use*—you really would be—he and you *both*, Mr. Verney—quite amazed and astounded, if you knew how much poverty there is in this town."

"It's well he does not know just now, for he wants all his wits about him. This is a critical occasion, you know, and the town expects great things from a practised orator. I've stolen away, just for five minutes, to ask you the news. We are at Ware, for a few days, only two or three friends with us. They came across in my boat to-day. We are going to set all the tradespeople on earth loose upon the house in a few days. It is to be done in an incredibly short time; and my uncle is talking of getting down some of his old lady relations to act chaperon, and we hope to have you all over there. You know it's all made up, that little coldness between my uncle and your father. I'm so glad. Your father wrote him such a nice note to-day explaining his absence—he never goes into a crowd, he says—and Lord Verney wrote him a line to say if he would allow him he would go up to Hazelden to pay his respects this afternoon."

This move was a suggestion of Mr. Larkin's, who was pretty well up in election strategy.

"I've ascertained, my Lord, he's good for a hundred and thirty-seven votes in the county, and your lordship has managed him with such consummate tact that a very little more will, with the Divine blessing, induce the happiest, and I may say, considering the disparity of your lordship's relations and his, the most *dutiful* feelings on his part—resulting, in fact, in your lordship's obtaining the absolute command of the constituency. You were defeated, my Lord, last time, by only forty-three votes, with his influence against you. If your lordship were to start your nephew, Mr. Cleve Verney, for it next time, having made your ground good with him, he would be returned, humanly speaking, by a sweeping majority."

"So, Lord Verney's going up to see papa! Agnes, *we* ought to be at home. He must have luncheon."

"No—a thousand thanks—but all that's explained. There's luncheon to be in the town-hall—it's part of the programme—and speeches—and all that kind of rubbish; so he can only run up for a few minutes, just to say, 'How do ye do?' and away again. So, pray, don't think of going all that way, and he'll come here to be introduced, and make your acquaintance; and now tell me all your news."

"Well, those odd people went away from Malory"—began Charity.

"Oh, yes, I heard, I think, something of that," said Cleve, intending to change the subject, perhaps. But Miss Charity went on, for in that eventless scene an occurrence of any kind is too precious to be struck out of the record on any ground.

"They went away as mysteriously as they came—almost—and so suddenly"——

"You forget, Charity, dear, Mr. Verney was at Ware when they went, and here two or three times after they left Malory."

"So I *was*," said Cleve, with an uneasy glance at Tom Sedley, "I *knew* I had heard something of it."

"Oh, yes," and they say that the old man was both mad and in debt."

"What a combination!" said Cleve.

"Yes, I assure you, and a Jew came down with twenty or thirty bailiffs—I'm only telling you what Mr. Apjohn heard, and the people here tell us—and a mad doctor, and ever so many people with strait waistcoats, and they surrounded Malory; but he was gone!—not a human being knew where—and that handsome girl, wasn't she quite *bee-au-ti-ful?*"

"Oh, what everyone says, you know, *must* be true," said Cleve.

"What do *you* say?" she urged upon Tom Sedley.

"Oh, I say ditto to everyone, of course."

"Well, I should think so, for you know you are quite desperately in love with her," said Miss Charity.

"*I?* Why, I really never spoke to her in all my life. Now if you had said Cleve Verney."

"Oh, yes! If you had named *me*. But, by Jove, there they go. Do you see? My uncle and the mayor, and all the lesser people, trooping away to the town-hall. Good-bye! I haven't another moment. You'll be here, I *hope*, when we get out; *do, pray*. I have not a moment."

And he meant a glance for Miss

Agnes, but it lost itself in air, for that young lady was looking down, in a little reverie on the grass, at the tip of her tiny boot.

"*There's* old Miss Christian *out*, I *declare*," exclaimed Charity. "Did you ever *hear* of such a thing? I *wonder* whether doctor knows she's out to-day. I'll just go and speak to her. If he doesn't, I'll simply tell her she's *mad!*"

And away marched Miss Charity, bent upon finding out, as she said, all about it.

"Agnes," said Tom Sedley, "it seemed to me you were not glad to see me. Are you vexed with me?"

"Vexed? No, indeed!" she said, gently, and looking up with a smile.

"And your sister said"—— Tom paused, for he did not know whether Charity's whisper about her not having been "very strong" might not be a confidence.

"*What* does Charity say?" asked Agnes almost sharply, while a little flush appeared in her cheeks.

"Well, she said she did not think you were so strong as usual. That was all."

"That was *all*—no great consequence," said she, with a little smile upon the grass and sea-pinks—a smile that was bitter.

"You can't think I meant that, little Agnes, *I* of all people; but I never was good at talking. And you *know* I did not mean that."

"People often say—*I* do, I know—what they mean without intending it," she answered, carelessly. "I *know* you would not make a rude speech—I'm sure of that; and as to what we say accidentally, can it signify very much? Mr. Verney said he was coming back after the speeches, and Lord Verney, he said, didn't he? I wonder you don't look in at the Town-hall. You could make us laugh, by telling all about it, by-and-bye—that is, if we happen to see you again."

"Of *course* you should see me again."

"I meant this evening; to-morrow I'm sure we should," said she.

"If I went there; but I'm not going. I think that old fellow, Lord Verney, Cleve's uncle, is an impertinent old muff. Everyone knows he's a muff, though he *is* Cleve's uncle; he gave me just one finger to-day, and looked at me as if I ought to be anywhere but where I was. I have as good a right as *he* to be in Cardyllian, and I venture to say the people like me a great deal better than they like him, or ever will."

"And so you punish him by refusing your countenance to this—what shall I call it?—gala."

"Oh! of course you take the Verney's part against me; they are swells, and I am a nobody."

He thought Miss Agnes coloured a little at this remark. The blood grows sensitive and capricious when people are ailing, and a hint is enough to send it to or fro; but she said only—

"I never heard of the feud before. I thought that you and Mr. Verney were very good friends."

"So we were; so we *are*—Cleve and I. Of course, I was speaking of the old Lord. Cleve, of course, no one ever hears anything but praises of Cleve. I suppose I ought to beg your pardon for having talked as I did of old Lord Verney; it's petty treason, isn't it, to talk lightly of a Verney, in Cardyllian or its neighbourhood?" said Sedley, a little sourly.

"I don't know *that;* but I dare say if you mean to ask leave to fish or shoot, it might be as well not to attack them."

"Well, I shan't in your hearing."

And with this speech came a silence.

"I don't think, somehow, that Cleve is as frank with me as he used to be. Can you imagine any reason?" said Tom, after an interval.

"*I?* No, upon my word—unless you are as frank to him about his uncle, as you have been with me."

"Well, I'm *not*. I never spoke to him about his uncle. But Shrapnell, who tells me all the news of Cardyllian while I'm away"—this was pointedly spoken—"said I thought that he had not been down here ever since the Malory people left, and I find that he was here for a week—at least at Ware—last Autumn, for a fortnight; and he never told me, though he knew, for I said so to him, that I thought he had stayed away, and I think that was very odd."

"He may have thought that he was not bound to account to you for his time and movements," said Miss Agnes.

"Well, he *was* here; Mrs. Jones was good enough to tell me so, though other people make a secret of it; *you* saw him here, I dare say."

"Yes he *was* here, for a few days. I think in October, or the end of September."

"Oh! thank you. But as I said, I had heard that already from Mrs. Jones, who is a most inconvenient gossip upon nearly *all* subjects."

"I rather like Mrs. Jones; you mean the 'draper,' as we call her? and if Mr. Verney is not as communicative as you would have him, I really can't help it; I can only assure you for your comfort that the mysterious tenants of Malory had disappeared long before that visit."

"I know perfectly when they went away," said Sedley drily.

Miss Agnes nodded with a scarcely perceptible smile.

"And I know—that is, I found out afterwards—that he admired her, I mean the young lady—Margaret, they called her—awfully. He never let me know it himself, though. I hate fellows being so close and dark about everything, and I've found out other things; and, in short, if people don't like to tell me their—*secrets* I won't call them, for everyone in Cardyllian knows all about them—I'm hanged if I ask them. All I know is, that Cleve is going to live a good deal at Ware, which means at Cardyllian, which will be a charming thing, a positive blessing, won't it? for the inhabitants and neighbours, and that I shall trouble them very little henceforward with my presence. There's Charity beckoning to me; would you mind my going to see what she wants?"

So, dismissed, away he ran like a "fielder" after a "by," as he had often run over the same ground before.

"Thomas Sedley, I want you to tell Lyster, the apothecary, to send a small bottle of *sal volatile* to Miss Christian immediately. I'd go myself—it's only round the corner—but I'm afraid of the crowd. If he can give it to you now, perhaps you'd bring it, and I'll wait here."

When he brought back the phial, and Miss Charity had given it with a message at Miss Christian's trellaced door, she took Tom's arm, and said—

"She has not been looking well."

"You mean Agnes?" conjectured he.

"Yes, of course. She's not herself. She does not tell me, but I *know* the cause, and, as an old friend of ours, and a friend, beside, of Mr. Cleve Verney, I must tell you that I think he is using her *disgracefully*."

"Really?"

"Yes, *most flagitiously*."

"How do you mean? Shrapnell wrote me word that he was very attentive, and used to join her in her walks, and afterwards he said that he had been mistaken, and discovered that he was awfully in love with the young lady at Malory."

"*Don't* believe a *word* of it. I *wonder* at Captain Shrapnell circulating such *insanity*. He must *know* how it really was, and *is*. I look upon it as *perfectly wicked*, the way that Captain Shrapnell talks. You're not to mention it, *of course*, to anyone. It would be *scandalous* of you, Thomas Sedly, to *think* of breathing a *word* to *mortal—mind that;* but I'm certain you *wouldn't*."

"What a beast Cleve Verney has turned out!" exclaimed Tom Sedley. "Do you think she still cares for him?"

"Why, of course she does. If he had been paying his addresses to *me*, and that *I* had grown by his perseverance and *devotion* to like him, do you think, Thomas Sedley, that although I might give him up in consequence of his misconduct, that I could ever cease to feel the same kind of feeling about him?" And as she put this incongruous case, she held Tom Sedley's arm firmly, showing her bony wrist above her glove; and with her gaunt brown face and saucer eyes turned full upon him, rather fiercely, Tom felt an inward convulsion at the picture of Cleve's adorations at this shrine, and the melting of the nymph, which by a miracle he repressed.

"But *you* may have more constancy than Agnes," he suggested.

"Don't talk like a *fool*, Thomas Sedley. *Every nice girl* is the *same*."

"May I talk to Cleve about it?"

"On *no account*. No *nice* girl could marry him *now*, and an apology would be simply *ridiculous*. *I* have not spoken to him on the subject, and though I had intended cutting him, my friend Mrs. Splayfoot was so clear that I should meet him just as usual,

that I do control the *expression* of my feelings, and endeavour to talk to him indifferently, though I should like *uncommonly* to tell him how *odious* I shall always think him."

"Yes, I remember," said Tom, who had been pondering. "Cleve *did* tell me, that time—it's more than a year ago now—it was a year in Autumn—that he admired Agnes, and used to walk with you on the green every day; he *did* certainly. I must do him that justice. But suppose Agnes did not show that she liked him, he might not have seen any harm."

"That's the way you men always take one another's parts. I must say, I think it is *odious*," exclaimed Charity, with a flush in her thin cheeks, and a terrible emphasis.

"But, I say, *did* she let him see that she liked him?"

"*No*, of *course* she didn't. No *nice* girl *would*. But of course he *saw* it," argued Charity.

"Oh, then she *showed* it?"

"No, she did *not* show it; there was *nothing* in *any*thing she *said* or *did*, that *could* lead *any*one, by look, or word, or act, to imagine that she liked him. How *can* you be so *perverse* and *ridiculous*, Thomas Sedley, to think she'd *show* her liking? Why, even *I* don't know it. I never *saw* it. She's a *great* deal *too nice*. You don't *know* Agnes. I should not venture to *hint* at it myself. Gracious goodness! What *fool* you are. Thomas Sedley! Hush."

The concluding caution was administered in consequence of their having got very near the seat where Agnes was sitting.

"Miss Christian is only nervous, poor old thing, and Tom Sedley has been getting *sal volatile* for her, and she'll be quite well in a day or two. Hadn't we better walk a little up and down; it's growing too cold for you to sit any longer, Agnes dear. Come."

And up got obedient Agnes, and the party of three walked up and down the green, conversing upon all sorts of subjects but the one so ably handled by Charity and Tom Sedley in their two or three minutes' private talk.

And now the noble lord and his party, and the mayor, and the corporation, and Mr. Larkin, and Captain Shrapnell, and many other celebrities, were seen slowly emerging from the lane that passes the George Inn, upon the green, and the peer having said a word or two to the mayor, and also to Lady Wimbledon, and bowed and pointed toward the jetty, the main body proceeded slowly toward that point, while Lord Verney, accompanied by Cleve, walked grandly toward the young ladies who were to be presented.

Tom Sedley, observing this movement, took his leave hastily, and in rather a marked way walked off at right angles with Lord Verney's line of march, twirling his cane.

CHAPTER XLIV.

VANE ETHERAGE GREETS LORD VERNEY.

So the great Lord Verney, with the flush of his brilliant successes in the Town-hall still upon his thin cheeks, and a countenance dry and solemn, to which smiling came not easily, made the acquaintance of the Miss Etherages, and observed that the younger was "sweetly pretty, about it, and her elder sister appeared to him a particularly sensible young woman, and was, he understood, very useful in the charities, and things." And he repeated to them in his formal way, his hope of seeing them at Ware, and was as gracious as such a man can be, and instead of attorneys and writs sent grouse and grapes to Hazelden.

And thus this narrow man, who did not easily forgive, expanded and forgave, and the secret of the subsidence of the quarrel, and of the Christian solution of the "difficulty," was simply Mr. Vane Etherage's hundred and thirty votes in the county.

What a blessing to these countries is representative government, with its attendant institution of the canvass! It is the one galvanism which no material can resist. It melts every heart, and makes the coldest, hardest, heaviest metals burst into beautiful flame. Granted that at starting, the geniality, repentance, kindness, are so many arrant hypocrisies; yet

who can tell whether these repentances, in white sheets, taper in hand, these offerings of birds and fruits, these smiles and compliments, and "Christian courtesies," may not end in improving the man who is compelled to act like a good fellow and accept his kindly canons, and improve *him* also with whom these better relations are established? As muscle is added to the limb, so strength is added to the particular moral quality we exercise, and kindness is elicited, and men perhaps end by having some of the attributes which they began by affecting. At all events, any recognition of the kindly and peaceable social philosophy of Christianity is, so far as it goes, good.

"What a sensible, nice, hospitable old man Lord Verney is; I think him *the* most sensible and the *nicest man* I *ever* met," said Miss Charity, in an enthusiasm which was quite genuine, for she was, honestly, no respecter of persons. "And young Mr. Verney certainly looked very handsome, but I don't like him."

"Don't like him! *Why?*" said Agnes, looking up.

"Because I think him perfectly *odious*," replied Miss Charity.

Agnes was inured to Miss Charity's adjectives, and even the fierce flush that accompanied some of them failed to alarm her.

"Well, I rather like him," she said, quietly.

"You *can't* like him, Agnes. It is not a matter of opinion at all; it's just simply a matter of *fact*—and you *know* that he is a most *worldly*, *selfish*, *cruel*, and, *I* think, *wicked* young man, and you need not talk about him, for he's *odious*. And here comes Thomas Sedley again."

Agnes smiled a faint and bitter smile.

"And what do you think of *him?*" she asked.

"Thomas Sedley? Of course I like him; we all like him. Don't you?" answered Charity.

"Yes, pretty well—very well. I suppose he has faults, like other people. He's good-humoured, selfish, of course—I fancy they all are. And papa likes him, I think; but really, Charrie, if you want to know, I don't care if I never saw him again."

"Hush!"

"*Well!* You've got rid of the Verneys, and here I am again," said Tom, approaching. "They are going up to Hazelden to see your father."

And so they were—up that pretty walk that passes the mills and ascends steeply by the precipitous side of the wooded glen, so steep, that in two places you have to mount by rude flights of steps—a most sequestered glen, and utterly silent, except for the sound of the mill-stream tinkling and crooning through the rocks below, unseen through the dense boughs and stems of the wood beneath.

If Lord Verney in his conciliatory condescension was grand, so was Vane Etherage on the occasion of receiving and forgiving him at Hazelden. He had considered and constructed a little speech, with some pomp of language, florid and magnanimous. He had sat in his bath-chair for half-an-hour at the little iron gate of the flower-garden of Hazelden, no inmate of which had ever seen him look, for a continuance, so sublimely important, and indeed solemn, as he had done all that morning.

Vane Etherage had made his arrangements to receive Lord Verney with a dignified deference. He was to be wheeled down the incline about 200 yards, to "the bower," to meet the peer at that point, and two lusty fellows were to push him up by Lord Verney's side to the house, where wine and other comforts awaited him.

John Evans had been placed at the mill to signal to the people above at Hazelden by a musket-shot the arrival of Lord Verney at that stage of his progress. The flagstaff and rigging on the green platform at Hazelden were fluttering all over with all the flags that ever were invented, in honour of the gala.

Lord Verney ascended, leaning upon the arm of his nephew, with Mr. Larkin and the Mayor for supporters, Captain Shrapnell, Doctor Lyster, and two or three other distinguished inhabitants of Cardyllian bringing up the rear.

Lord Verney carried his head high, and grew reserved and rather silent as they got on, and as they passed under the solemn shadow of the great trees by the mill, an overloaded musket went off with a sound like a cannon, as Lord Verney afterwards protested, close to the unsuspecting party, and

a loud and long whoop from John Evans completed the concerted signal.

The Viscount actually jumped, and Cleve felt the shock of his arm against his side.

"D—— you, John Evans, what the *devil* are you *doing ?*" exclaimed Captain Shrapnell, who, turning from white to crimson, was the first of the party to recover his voice.

"Yes, sir, thank you—very good," said Evans, touching his hat, and smiling incessantly with the incoherent volubility of Welsh politeness. "A little bit of a squib, sir, if you please, for Captain Squire Etherage —very well, I thank you—to let him know Lord Verney—very much obliged, sir—was at the mill—how do you do, sir ?—and going up to Hazelden, if you please, sir."

And the speech subsided in a little, gratified laugh of delighted politeness.

"You'd better not do that *again*, though," said the Captain, with a menacing wag of his head, and availing himself promptly of the opportunity of improving his relations with Lord Verney, he placed himself by his side, and assured him that though he was an old campaigner, and had smelt powder in all parts of the world, he had never heard such a report from a musket in all his travels and adventures before; and hoped Lord Verney's hearing was not the worse of it. He had known a general officer deafened by a shot, and, by Jove, his own ears were singing with it still, accustomed as he was, by Jupiter, to such things !

His lordship, doing his best on the festive occasion, smiled uncomfortably, and said—

"Yes—thanks—ha, ha! I really thought it was a cannon—about it."

And Shrapnell called back and said—

"Don't you be coming on with that thing, John Evans—do you mind ?—Lord Verney's had quite enough of that.

"You'll excuse me, Lord Verney, I thought you'd wish so much said," and Lord Verney bowed graciously.

The answering shot and cheer which were heard from above announced to John Evans that the explosion had been heard at Hazelden, and still smiling and touching his heart, he continued his voluble civilities—"Very good, sir, very much obliged, sir, very well, I thank you ; I hope you are very well, sir, very good indeed, sir," and so forth, till they were out of hearing.

The shot, indeed, was distinctly heard at the gay flag-staff up at Hazelden, and the Admiral got under weigh, and proceeded down the incline charmingly till they had nearly reached the little platform at the bower, where, like Christian in his progress, he was to make a halt.

But his plans at this point were disturbed. Hardly twenty yards before they reached it, one of his men let go, the drag upon the other suddenly increased, and resulted in a pull, which caused him to trip, and as men tripping while in motion downhill will, he butted forward; charging headlong, and finally tumbling on his face, he gave to the rotatory throne of Mr. Etherage such an impulse as carried him quite past the arbour, and launched him upon the steep descent of the gravel-walk with a speed every moment accelerated.

"Stop her !—ease her !—d—— you, Williams !" roared the Admiral, little knowing how idle were his orders. The bath-chair had taken head, the pace became furious ; the running footmen gave up pursuit in despair, and Mr. Vane Etherage was obliged to concentrate his severest attention, as he never did before, on the task of guiding his flying vehicle, a feat which was happily favoured by the fact that the declivity presented no short turns.

The sounds were heard below—a strange ring of wheels, and a powerful voice bawling, "Ease her ! stop her !" and some stronger expressions.

"Can't be a carriage, about it, *here ?*" exclaimed Lord Verney, halting abruptly, and only restrained from skipping upon the side bank by a sense of dignity.

"Never mind, Lord Verney, don't mind, I'll take care of you, I'm your vanguard," exclaimed Captain Shrapnell, with a dare-devil gaiety, inspired by the certainty that it could not be a carriage, and the conviction that the adventure would prove nothing more than some children and nursery maids playing with a perambulator.

His feelings underwent a revulsion, however, when old Vane Etherage, enveloped in cloaks and shawls, his hat gone, and his long grizzled hair

streaming backward, with a wild countenance, and both hands working the directing handle, came swooping into sight, roaring, maniacally, "Ease her! back her!" and yawing frightfully in his descent upon them.

Captain Shrapnell, they say, turned pale at the spectacle, but he felt he must now go through with it, or for ever sacrifice that castle-in-the-air, of which the events of the day had suggested the ground-plan and elevation.

"Good heaven! he'll be killed, about it!" exclaimed Lord Verney, peeping from behind a tree, with unusual energy; but whether he meant Shrapnell, or Etherage, or both, I don't know, and nobody in that moment of sincerity minded much what he meant. I dare say a front-rank man in a square at Waterloo did not feel before the gallop of the Cuirassiers as the gallant Captain did before the charge of the large invalid who was descending upon him. All he meditated was a decent show of resistance, and as he had a stout walking-stick in his hand, something might be done without risking his bones. So, as the old gentleman thundered downward, roaring "Keep her off—keep her clear," Shrapnell, roaring "*I*'m your man!" nervously popped the end of his stick under the front wheel of the vehicle, himself skipping to one side, unhappily the wrong one, for the chair at this check spun round, and the next spectacle was, Mr. Vane Etherage and Captain Shrapnell, enveloped in cloaks and mufflers, and rolling over and over in one another's arms, like athletes in mortal combat, the Captain's fist being visible, as they rolled round, at Mr. Vane Etherage's back, with his walking-stick still clutched in it.

The chair was lying on its side, the gentlemen were separated, Captain Shrapnell jumped to his feet.

"Well, Lord Verney, I believe I did something there!" said the gallant Captain with the air of a man who has done his duty, and knows it.

"Done something! you've broke my neck, you lubber!" panted Mr. Vane Etherage who, his legs not being available, had been placed sitting with some cloaks about him, on the bank.

Shrapnell grinned and winked expressively, and confidentially whispered, "Jolly old fellow he is—no one minds the Admiral; we let him talk."

"Lord Verney," said his lordship, introducing himself with a look and air of polite concern.

"No, my name's Etherage," said the invalid, mistaking—he fancied that Jos. Larkin, who was expounding his views of the accident grandly to Cleve Verney in the background, could not be less than a peer—"I live up there, at Hazelden—devilish near being *killed here*, by that lubber there. Why I was running at the rate of five-and-twenty knots an hour, if I was making *one;* and I remember it right well, sir, there's a check down there, just before you come to the mill-stile, and the wall there; and I'd have run my bows right into it, and not a bit the worse, sir, if that d—— fellow had just kept out of the—the—king's course, you know; and egad, I don't know now how it is—I suppose I'm smashed, sir."

"I hope not, sir. I am Lord Verney—about it; and it would pain me extremely to learn that any serious injuries, or—or—things—had been sustained, about it."

"I'll tell that in a moment," said Doctor Lyster, who was of the party, briskly.

So after a variety of twists and wrenches and pokes, Vane Etherage was pronounced sound and safe.

"I don't know how the devil I escaped!" exclaimed the invalid.

"By tumbling on *me*—very simply," replied Captain Shrapnell with a spirited laugh.

"You may set your mind at rest, Shrapnell," said the Doctor walking up to him, with a congratulatory air. "He's all right, this time; but you had better not mind giving the old fellow any more rolls of that sort—the pitcher to the well, you know—and the next time might smash him."

"I'm more concerned about smashing myself, thank you. The next time he may roll to the devil—and through whoever he pleases for me—knocked down with that blackguard old chair, and that great hulking fellow on top of me—all for trying to be of use, egad, when everyone of you funked it—and not a soul asks about *my* bones, egad, or my neck either."

"Oh! come Shrapnell, you're not setting up for an old dog yet. There's

a difference between you and Etherage," said the Doctor.

"I hope so," answered the Captain sarcastically, "but civility is civility all the world over; and I can tell you, another fellow would make fuss enough about the pain I'm suffering."

It was found, further, that one wheel of the bath-chair was disorganized, and the smith must come from the town to get it to rights, and that Vane Etherage, who could as soon have walked up a rainbow as up the acclivity to Hazelden, must bivouac for a while where he sat.

So there the visit was paid, and the exciting gala of that day closed, and the Viscount and his party marched down, with many friends attendant, to the jetty, and embarked in the yacht for Ware.

CHAPTER XLV.

REBECCA MERVYN READS HER LETTER.

THE evenings being short, the shops alight, and the good people of Cardyllian in their houses, Tom Sedley found the hour before dinner hang heavily on his hands. So he walked slowly up Castle-street, and saw Mr. Robson, the worthy post-master, standing, with his hands in his pockets, at the open door.

"No letter for me, I dare say?" asked Sedley.

"No, sir—nothing."

"I don't know how to kill the time. I wish my dinner was ready. You dined, like a wise man, at one o'clock, I dare say?"

"We do—we dine early here, sir."

"I know it; a capital plan. I do it myself, whenever I make any stay here."

"And you can eat a bit o' something hearty at tea then."

"To be sure; that's the good of it. I don't know what to do with myself. I'll take a walk round by Malory. Can I leave the Malory letters for you?"

"You're only joking, sir."

"I was not, upon my honour. I'd be glad to bolt your shutters, or to twig your steps—anything to do. I literally don't know what to do with myself."

"There's no family at Malory, you know, now, sir."

"Oh! I did not know. I knew the other family had gone. No letters to be delivered then?"

"Well, sir, there *is*—but you're only joking."

"What is it?"

"A letter to Mrs. Rebecca Mervyn—but I would not think of troubling a gentleman with it."

"Old Rebecca; why I made her acquaintance among the shingles and cockles on the sea-shore last year—a charming old sea-nymph, or whatever you call it!"

"We all have a great respect for Mrs. Mervyn, down here, in Cardyllian. The family has a great opinion of her, and they think a great deal of her, like us," said Mr. Robson, who did not care to hear any mysterious names applied to her without a protest.

"Well—so I say—so have I. I'll give her the letter, and take a receipt," said Sedley, extending his hand.

"There really *is* a receipt, sir, wanting," said the official, amused. "It came this morning—and if you'll come in—if it isn't too much trouble—I'll show it to you, please, sir."

In he stepped to the post-office, where Mr. Robson showed him a letter which he had that afternoon received. It said—

"SIR,—I enclose five shillings, represented by postage-stamps, which will enable you to pay a messenger on whom you can depend, to deliver a letter which I place along with this in the post-office, into the hand of Mrs. Mervyn, Steward's-house, Malory, Cardyllian, to whom it is addressed, and which is marked with the letter D at the left hand corner.

"I am, Sir,

Your obt. servant,

J. DINGWELL."

"The letter is come," said Mr. Robson, taking it out of a pigeon-hole in a drawer, and thumbing it, and smiling on it with a gentle curiosity.

"Yes—that's it," said Tom Sedley, also reading the address. "'Mrs.

Mervyn'—what a queer old ghost of a lady she is!—'Malory,' that's the ground—and the letter D in the corner. Well, I'm quite serious. I'll take the letter with pleasure, and see the old woman, and put it into her hand. I'm not joking, and I shall be back again, in an hour, I dare say, and I'll tell you what she says, and how she looks—that is, assuming it is a love-letter."

"Well, sir, as you wish it; and it's very kind of you, and the old lady must sign a receipt, for the letter's registered—but it's too much trouble for you, sir, is'nt it really?"

"Nonsense; give me the letter. If you won't, I can't help it."

"And this receipt should be signed."

"And the receipt also."

So away went our friend, duly furnished, and marched over the hill we know so well, that overhangs the sea, and down by the narrow old road to Malory, thinking of many things.

The phantom of the beautiful lady of Malory was very much faded now. Even as he looked down on the old house and woodlands, the romance came not again. It was just a remembered folly, like others, and excited or pained him little more. But a new trouble vexed him. How many of our blessings do we take for granted, enjoy thanklessly, like our sight, our hearing, our health, and only appreciate when they are either withdrawn or in danger!

Captain Shrapnell had written among his gossip some jocular tattle about Cleve's devotion to Miss Agnes Etherage, which had moved him oddly and uncomfortably; but the next letter disclosed the mystery of Cleve's clandestine visits to Malory, and turned his thoughts into a new channel.

But here was all revived, and worse. Charity, watching with a woman's eyes, and her opportunities, had made to him a confidence about which there could be no mistake; and then Agnes was so changed—not a bit glad to see him! And did not she look pretty? Was there not a slight look of pride—a reserve—that was new—a little sadness—along with the heightened beauty of her face and figure? How on earth had he been so stupid as not to perceive how beautiful she was all this time? Cleve had more sense. By Jove, she was the prettiest girl in England, and that selfish fellow had laid himself out to make her fond of him, and, having succeeded, jilted her. And now she would not care for any one but him.

There was a time, he thought, when he, Tom Sedley, might have made her like him. What a fool he was! And that was past—unimproved—irrevocable—and now she never could. Girls may affect those second likings, he thought, but they never really care after the first. It is pride, or pique, or friendship, or convevenience—anything but love.

Love! And what had he to do with love? Who would marry him on four hundred a year, and no expectations? And now he was going to teaze himself because he had not stepped in before Cleve Verney and secured the affections of little Agnes. What a fool he was! What business had he dreaming such dreams? He had got on very well without falling in love with Agnes. Why should he begin now? If he found *that* folly gaining upon him, he would leave Cardyllian without staying his accustomed week, and never return till the feeling had died as completely as last year's roses.

Down the hill he marched in his new romance, as he had done more than a year ago, over the same ground, in his old one, when in the moonlight, on the shingle, he had met the same old lady of whom he was now in quest.

The old trees of Malory rose up before him, dark and silent, higher and higher as he approached. It was a black night—no moon; even the stars obscured by black lines of cloud as he pushed open the gate, and entered the deeper darkness of the curving carriage-road that leads up through the trees.

It was six o'clock now, and awfully dark. When he reached the open space before the hall-door, he looked up at the dim front of the house, but no light glimmered there. The deep-mouthed dog in the stable-yard was yelling his challenge, and he further startled the solitary woods by repeated double-knocks that boomed through the empty hall and chambers of the deserted house.

Despairing of an entrance at last, and not knowing which way to turn,

he took the way by chance which led him to the front of the Steward's-house, from the diamond casement of which a light was shining. The door lay open; only the latch was closed, such being the primitive security that prevails in that region of poverty and quietude.

With his stick he knocked a little tattoo, and a candle was held over the clumsy banister, and the little servant girl inquired in her clear Welsh accent what he wanted.

So, preliminaries over, he mounted to that chamber in which Mr. Levi had been admitted to a conference among the delft and porcelain, stags, birds, officers, and huntsmen, who, in gay tints and old-fashioned style, occupied every coigne of vantage, and especially that central dresser, which mounted nearly to the beams of the ceiling.

The room is not large, the recesses are deep, the timber-work is of clumsy oak, and the decorations of old-world teapots, jugs, and beasts of the field, and cocked-hatted gentlemen in gorgeous colouring and gilding, so very gay and splendid, reflecting the candle-light, and the wavering glare of the fire from a thousand curves and angles, and the old shining furniture, and carved oak clock; the room itself, and all its properties so perfectly neat and tidy, not one grain of dust or single cob-web to be seen in any nook or crevice, that Tom Sedley was delighted with the scene.

What a delightful retreat, he thought, from the comfortless affectations of the world. Here was the ideal of snugness, and of brightness and warmth. It amounted to a kind of beauty that absolutely fascinated him. He looked kindly on the old lady, who had laid down her knitting, and looked at him through a pair of round spectacles, and thought that he would like to adopt her for his housekeeper, and live a solitary life of lonely rabbit-shooting in Penruthyn-park, trout-fishing in the stream, and cruising in an imaginary yacht on the estuary and the contiguous seaboard.

This little plan, or rather vision, pictured itself to Tom Sedley's morbid and morose imagination as the most endurable form of life to which he could now aspire.

The old lady, meanwhile, was looking at him with an expression of wonder and anxiety, and he said—

"I hope, Mrs. Mervyn, I have not disturbed you much. It is not quite so late as it looks, and as the postmaster, Mr. Robson, could not find a messenger, and I was going this way, I undertook to call and give you the letter, having once had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, although you do not, I'm afraid, recollect me."

"I knew it, the moment his face entered the room. It was the same face," she repeated, as if she had seen a picture, not a face.

"Just under the walls of Malory; you were anxious to learn whether a sail was in sight, in the direction of Pendyllion," said he, suggesting.

"No, there was none; it was not there. People—other people—would have tired of watching long ago; my old eyes never dazzled, sir. And *he* came, so like, he came. I thought it was a spirit from the sea; and here he is. There's something in your voice, sir, and your face. It is wonderful; but not a Verney—no, you told me so. They are cruel men—one way or other they were all cruel, but some more than others—my God! much more. There's something in the eyes—the setting, the light—it can't be mistaken; something in the curve of the chin, very pretty—but you're no Verney, you told me—and see how he comes here a second time, smiling—and yet when he goes, it is like waking from a dream where they were, as they all used to look, long ago; and there's a pain at my heart, for weeks after. It never can be again, sir; I'm growing old. If it ever comes, it will find me so changed—or dead, I sometimes begin to think, and try to make up my mind. There's a good world, you know, where we'll all meet and be happy, no more parting or dying, sir. Yet I'd like to see him even once, here, just as he was, a beautiful mortal; and sometimes, sir, I despair; though I know, I know I *ought not*—God is so good; and while there's life there is hope."

"Certainly, hope, there's always hope; everyone has something to vex them. *I* have, I know, Mrs. Mervyn; and I was just thinking what a charming drawing-room this is, and how delightful it must be, the

quiet and comfort, and glow of such a room. There is no drawing-room on earth I should like so well," said good-natured Tom Sedley, whose sympathies were easy, and who liked saying a pleasant thing when he could; "And this is the letter, and here is a printed receipt, which, when you have been so kind as to sign it, I've promised to give to my friend, Mr. Robson of the post-office."

"Thank you, sir; this is registered, they call it. I had one a long time ago, with the same kind of green ribbon round it. Won't you sit down while I sign this?"

"Many thanks," said Sedley, sitting down gravely at the table, and looking so thoughtful, and somehow so much at home, that you might have fancied his dream of living in the Steward's-house had long been accomplished.

"I'd rather not get a letter, sir; I don't know the handwriting of this address, and a letter can but bring me sorrow. There is but one welcome chance which could befall me, and that I hope *may* come yet, just a *hope*, sir. Sometimes it brightens up, but it has been low all to-day."

"Sorry you have been out of spirits, Mrs. Mervyn, I know what it is; I've been so myself, and I *am* so, rather, just now," said Tom, who was, in this homely seclusion, tending towards confidence.

"There are now but two handwritings that I should know; one is his, the other Lady Verney's; all the rest are dead; and this is neither."

"Well, Mrs. Mervyn, if it does not come from either of the persons you care for, it yet may tell you news of them," remarked Tom Sedley, sagely.

"Hardly, sir. I hear every three months from Lady Verney. I heard on Tuesday last. Thank God, she's well. No, it's nothing concerning her, and I think it may be something bad. I am afraid of this letter."

"I know the feeling, Mrs. Mervyn; I've had it myself, when duns were troublesome. But you have nothing of the kind in this happy retreat; which I really do envy you from my heart."

"Envy nothing. Happy retreat! Little you know, sir. I have been for weeks and months at a time half wild with anguish, dreaming of the sea. How can he know?"

"Very true, I can't know; I only speak of it as it strikes me at the moment. I fancy I should so like to live here, like a hermit, quite out of the persecutions of luck and the nonsense of the world."

"You are wonderfully like at times, sir—it is beautiful, it is frightful—when I moved the candle then——"

"I'll sit any way you like best, Mrs. Mervyn, with pleasure, and you can move the candle, and try if it can amuse—no, I mean interest you."

If some of his town friends could have peeped in through a keyhole, and seen Tom Sedley and old Rebecca Mervyn seated at opposite sides of the table, in this very queer old room, so like Darby and Joan, it would have made matter for a comical story.

"Like a flash it comes!"

Tom Sedley looked at the wild, large eyes that were watching him—the round spectacles now removed—across the table, and could not help smiling.

"Yes, the *smile*—it *is* the smile! You told me, sir, your name was Sedley, not Verney."

"My name is Thomas Sedley. My father was Captain Sedley, and served through a part of the Peninsular campaign. He was not twenty at the battle of Vittoria, and he was at Waterloo. My mother died a few months after I was born."

"Was *she* a Verney?"

"No; she was distantly connected, but her name was Melville," said he.

"Connected. That accounts for it, perhaps."

"Very likely."

"And your father—dead?" she said, sadly.

"Yes; twenty years ago."

"Was he related, sir, to the Verneys?"

"No, they were friends. He managed two of the estates after he left the army, and very well, I'm told."

"Sedley—Thomas Sedley—I remember the name. We did not know the name of Sedley—except on one occasion—I was sent for, but it came to nothing. But I lived so much in the dark about things," and she sighed.

"I forgot, Mrs. Mervyn, how late it is growing, and how much too long I have stayed here admiring your pretty room, and I fear interrupting you," said Tom, suddenly remembering his

dinner, and standing up—"If you kindly give me the receipt, I'll leave it on my way back."

Mrs. Mervyn had clipped the silken cord, and was now reading the letter, and he might as well have addressed his little speech to the china shepherdess, with the straw disk and ribbons on her head, in the bodice and short petticoat of flowered brocade, leaning against a tree, with a lamb with its hind leg and tail broken off, looking affectionately in her face.

"I can't make it out, sir; your eyes are young—perhaps you would read it to me—it is not very long."

"Certainly, with pleasure"—and Tom Sedley sat down, and, spreading the letter on the table, under the candles, read as follows to the old lady opposite:—

"PRIVATE.

"MADAM,—As an old and intimate friend of your reputed husband, I take leave to inform you that he placed a sum of money in my hands for the use of your son and his, if he be still living. Should he be so, will you be so good as to let me know where it will reach him. A line to Jos. Larkin, esq., at the Verney Arms, Cardyllian, or a verbal message, if you desire to see him, will suffice. Mr. Larkin is the solvent and religious attorney of the present Lord Verney, and you have my consent to advise with him on the subject.

"I have the honour to be,
Madam,
Your obedient servant,
J. DINGWELL."

"P.S.—You are aware, I suppose, madam, that I am the witness who proved the death of the late Hon. Arthur Verney, who died of a low fever in Constantinople, in July twelve months."

"*Died!* My God! Died! did you say *died?*"

"Yes. I thought you knew. It was proved a year ago nearly. The elder brother of the present Lord Verney."

There followed a silence while you might count ten, and then came a long, wild, and bitter cry.

The little girl started up, with white lips, and said, "Lord bless us!" The sparrows in the ivy about the windows fluttered—even Tom Sedley was chilled and pierced by that desolate scream.

"I'm very sorry, really, I'm awfully sorry," Tom exclaimed, finding himself, he knew not how, again on his feet, and gazing at the white, imploring face of the trembling old woman. "I really did not know—I had not an idea you felt such an interest in any of the family. If I had known I should have been more careful. I'm shocked at what I've done."

"Oh! Arthur—oh! Arthur. He's gone—*after all*, after *all*—my darling will never come again—I waiting my whole life away, watching and hoping for you, my darling," she sobbed wildly. "If we could have only met for a minute, just that I might tell you—but, oh! you can't hear, you'll never know." She was drawing back the window-curtain, looking towards the dark Pendyllion and the starless sea—"He was beautiful, my darling, away by Pendyllion. I watched his sail till it was out of sight—watching in the window, till it was quite out of sight—crying alone, till it grew dark. He thought he'd come again—he went smiling—and my heart misgave me. I said that day, crying alone, he'll never come again. I'm never to see my beautiful Arthur any more—never—never—never. Oh, darling, darling, so far away. If I could even see his grave."

"I'm awfully sorry, ma'am; I wish I could be of any use," said honest Tom Sedley, speaking very low and kindly, standing beside her, with, I think, tears in his eyes. "I wish so much, ma'am, you could employ me any way. I'd be so glad to be of any use, about your son, or to see that Mr. Larkin. I don't like his face, ma'am, and would not advise your trusting him too much."

"The little child's dead, sir. It was a beautiful little thing; when it was ten weeks and two days old it died, the darling, and I have no one now."

"I'll come to you and see you in the morning," said Tom.

And he walked home in the dark, and stopped on the summit of the hill, looking down upon the twinkling lights of the town, and back again toward solemn Malory, thinking of what he had seen, and what an odd world it was.

CHAPTER XLVI.

BY RAIL TO LONDON.

About an hour later, Tom Sedly, in solitude, meditated thus—

"I wonder whether the Etherages"—(meaning pretty Miss Agnes)—"would think it a bore if I went up to see them. It's too late for tea. I'm afraid they mightn't like it. No one, of course, like Cleve now. They'd find me very dull, I dare say. I don't care, I'll walk up, and if I see the lights in the drawing-room windows, I'll try."

He did walk up; he did see the lights in the drawing-room windows; and he did try, with the result of finding himself upon the drawing-room carpet a minute after, standing at the side of Agnes, and chatting to Miss Charity.

"How is your father?" asked Tom, seeing the study untenanted.

"Not at *all* well, *I* think; he had an accident to-day. Didn't you hear?"

"*Accident!* No, I didn't."

"Oh! yes. Somehow, when Lord Verney and the other people were coming up here to-day, he was going to meet them, and among them they overturned his bath-chair, and I don't know really who's to blame. Captain Shrapnell says he saved his life; but, however it happened, he was upset and very much shaken. I see you laughing, Thomas Sedley! What on earth *can* you see in it to laugh at? It's so exactly like Agnes — she *laughed!* you did, *indeed*, Agnes, and if I had not *seen* it, with my *own eyes*, I *could* not have *believed* it!"

"I knew papa was not hurt, and I could not help laughing, if you put me to death for it, and they say he drove over Lord Verney's foot."

"That would not break my heart, said Sedley. "Did you hear the particulars from Cleve?"

"No, I did not see Mr. Verney to speak to, since the accident," said Miss Charity. "By-the-bye, who was the tall, good-looking girl, in the seal-skin coat, he was talking to all the way to the jetty? I think she was Lady Wimbledon's daughter."

"So she was; has she rather large blue eyes?"

"Yes."

"Oh! it must be she; that's Miss Caroline Oldys. She's such a joke; she's elder than Cleve."

"Oh! that's impossible; she's decidedly younger than Mr. Cleve Verney, and, I think, extremely pretty."

"Well, perhaps she *is* younger, and I *do* believe she's pretty; but she's a fool, and she has been awfully in love with him for I don't know how many years—every one was laughing at it, two or three seasons ago; she *is* such a muff!"

"What *do* you mean by a muff?" demanded Charity.

"Well, a goose, then. Lord Verney's her guardian or trustee, or something; and they say, that he and Lady Wimbledon had agreed to promote the affair. Just like them. She is such a scheming old woman; and Lord Verney is such a—I was going to say, such a *muff*,—but he is such a *spoon*. Cleve's wide awake, though, and I don't think he'll do *that* for them."

I believe there may have been, at one time, some little foundation in fact for the theory which supposed the higher powers favourable to such a consummation. But time tests the value of such schemes, and it would seem that Lady Wimbledon had come to the conclusion that the speculation was a barren one: for, this night, in her dressing-gown, with her wig off, and a silken swathing about her bald head, she paid a very exciting visit to her daughter's room, and blew her up in her own awful way, looking like an angry Turk. "She wondered how any person with Caroline's *experience* could be such an *idiot* as to let that young man go on making a fool of her. He had no other idea but the one of making a *fool* of her before the world. She, Lady Wimbledon, would have no more of any such insensate folly—her prospects should not be ruined, if she could prevent it, and prevent it she *could* and *would*—there should be an end of that odious nonsense; and if she chose to make herself the laughing-stock of the world, she, Lady Wimbledon, would do her duty and take her down to Slominton, where they would be quiet enough at all events;

and Cleve Verney, she ventured to say, with a laugh, would not follow her."

The young lady was in tears, and blubbered in her romantic indignation till her eyes and nose were inflamed, and her mamma requested her to look in the glass, and see what a figure she had made of herself, and made her bathe her face for an hour, before she went to bed.

There was no other young lady at Ware, and Cleve smiled in his own face, in his looking-glass, as he dressed for dinner.

"My uncle will lose no time—I did not intend this; but I see very well what he means, and he'll be disappointed and grow suspicious, if I draw back; and she has really nothing to recommend her, poor Caroline, and he'll find that out time enough, and meanwhile I shall get over some months quietly."

There was no great difficulty in seeing, indeed, that the noble host distinguished Lady Wimbledon and her daughter. And Lord Verney, leaning on Cleve's arm, asked him lightly what he thought of Miss Caroline Oldys; and Cleve, who had the gift of presence of mind, rather praised the young lady.

"My uncle would prefer Ethel, when he sees a hope in that direction, I shan't hear much more of Caroline, and so on—and we shall be growing older—and the chapter of accidents—and all that."

For a day or two Lord Verney was very encouraging, and quite took an interest in the young lady, and showed her the house and the place, and unfolded all the plans which were about to grow into realities, and got Cleve to pull her across the lake, and walked round to meet them, and amused the young man by contriving that little opportunity. But Lady Wimbledon revealed something to Lord Verney, that evening, over their game of *ecarté*, which affected his views.

Cleve was talking to the young lady, but he saw Lord Verney look once or twice, in the midst of a very serious conversation with Lady Wimbledon, at Caroline Oldys and himself, and now without smiling.

It was Lady Wimbledon's deal, but she did not deal, and her opponent seemed also to have forgotten the cards, and their heads inclined one toward the other as the talk proceeded.

It was about the hour when ladies light their bedroom candles, and ascend. And Lady Wimbledon and Caroline Oldys had vanished in a few minutes more, and Cleve thought, "She has told him something that has given him a new idea." His uncle was rather silent and dry for the rest of that evening, but next morning seemed pretty much as usual, only Lord Verney took an opportunity of saying to him—

"I have been considering, and I have heard things, and, with reference to the subject of my conversation with you, in town, I think you ought to direct your thoughts to *Ethel*, about it—you ought to have money—don't you see? It's very important—money—very well to be *le fils de ses œuvres*, and that kind of thing; but a little money does no harm; on the contrary, it is very desirable. Other people keep that point in view; I don't see why we should not. I ask myself this question:—How is it that people get on in the world? And I answer—in great measure by amassing money; and arguing from *that*, I think it desirable you should have some money to begin with, and I've endeavoured to put it logically, about it, that you may see the drift of what I say." And he made an excuse and sent Cleve up to town next day before him.

I have been led into an episode by Miss Charity's question about Miss Caroline Oldys; and returning to Hazelden, I find Tom Sedley taking his leave of the young ladies for the night, and setting out for the Verney Arms with a cigar between his lips.

Next morning he walked down to Malory again, and saw old Rebecca, who seemed, in her odd way, comforted on seeing him, but spoke little—almost nothing, and he charged her to tell neither Dingwell, of whom he had heard nothing but evil, nor Jos. Larkin, of whom he had intuitively a profound suspicion,—anything about her own history, or the fate of her child, but to observe the most cautious reserve in any communications they might seek to open with her. And having delivered this injunction in a great variety of language, he took his leave, and got home very early to his breakfast, and ran up to

London, oddly enough, in the same carriage with Cleve Verney.

Tom Sedley was angry with Cleve, I am afraid not upon any very high principle. If Cleve had trifled with the affections of Miss Caroline Oldys, I fear he would have borne the spectacle of her woes with considerable patience. But if the truth must be told, honest Tom Sedley was leaving Cardyllian in a pet. Anger, grief, jealously, were seething in his good-natured heart. Agnes Etherage—*his* little Agnes—she had belonged to him as long as he could remember; she was gone, and he never knew how much he liked her until he had lost her.

Gone? No; in his wanton cruelty this handsome outlaw had *slain* his pet deer—had *shot* his sweet bird dead, and there she lay in the sylvan solitude she had so beautified—*dead;* and he—heartless archer—went on his way smiling, having darkened the world for harmless Tom Sedley. Could he like him ever again?

Well, the world brooks no heroics now; there are reserves. Men cultivate a thick skin—nature's buff-coat—in which, with little pain and small loss of blood, the modern man-at-arms rides cheerily through life's battle. When point or edge happen to go a little through, as I have said, there are reserves. There is no good in roaring, grinning, or cursing. The scatheless only laugh at you; therefore wipe away the blood quietly, and seem all you can like the rest. Better not to let them see even *that.* Is there not sometimes more of curiosity than of sympathy in the scrutiny? Don't you even see, at times, just the suspicion of a smile on your friend's face, as he prescribes wet brown paper or basilicon on a cobweb, according to his skill?

So Tom and Cleve talked a little—an acquaintance would have said, just as usual—and exchanged newspapers, and even laughed a little now and then; but when at Shillingsworth the last interloper got out, and Tom and Cleve were left to themselves, the ruling idea asserted itself, and Sedley looked luridly out of the window, and grew silent for a time, and pretended not to hear Cleve when he asked him whether he had seen the report of Lord Verney's visit to Cardyllian, as displayed in the county paper of that day, which served to amuse him extremely.

"I don't think," said Tom Sedley at last, abruptly, "that nice, pretty little creature, Agnes Etherage—the nicest little thing, by Jove, I think I ever saw—I say she is not looking well."

"Is not she really?" said Cleve, very coolly, cutting open a leaf in his magazine.

"Didn't you observe?" exclaimed Tom, rather fiercely.

"Well, no, I can't say I did; but you know them so much better than I," answered Cleve; "it can't be very much; I dare say she's well by this time."

"How *can* you speak that way, Verney, knowing all you do?"

"Why, *what* do I know?" exclaimed Cleve, looking up in unaffected wonder.

"You know all about it; *why* she's out of spirits, *why* she's looking so delicate, *why* she's not like herself," said Tom, impatiently.

"Upon my soul I do *not,*" said Cleve Verney, with animation.

"That's odd, considering you've half broken her heart," urged Tom.

"I broken her heart?" repeated Cleve. "Now, really, Sedley, do pray think what you're saying."

"I say I think you've broken her heart, and her sister thinks so too; and it's an awful shame," insisted Tom, very grimly.

"I really do think the people want to set me mad," said Cleve, testily. "If anyone says that I have ever done anything that could have made any of that family, who are in their senses, fancy that I was in love with Miss Agnes Etherage, and that I wished her to suppose so, it is simply an *untruth.* I never did, and I don't intend; and I can't see, for the life of me, Tom Sedley, what business it is of yours. But thus much I do say, upon my honour, it is a lie. Miss Charity Etherage, an old maid, with no more sense than a snipe, living in that barbarous desert, where if a man appears at all, during eight months out of the twelve, he's a prodigy, and if he walks up the street with a Cardyllian lady, he's pronounced to be over head and ears in love, and of course meditating marriage—I say she's not the most reliable critic in the world in an affair of

that sort, and all I say is that I've given *no* grounds for any such idea, and I mean it, upon my honour as a gentleman; and I've seldom been so astonished in my life before."

There was an air of frank and indignant repudiation in Cleve's manner and countenance, which more even than his words convinced Tom Sedley, who certainly was aware how little the Cardyllian people knew of the world, and what an eminently simple maiden in all such matters the homely Miss Charity was. So Tom extended his hand and said—

"Well, Cleve, I'm so glad, and I beg your pardon, and I know you say truth, and pray shake hands; but though you are not to blame—I'm now quite *sure* you're not—the poor girl is very unhappy, and her sister very angry."

"I can't help *that*. How on earth can *I* help it? I'm very sorry, though I'm not sure that I ought to care a farthing about other people's nonsense, and huffs, and romances. I could tell you things about myself, lots of things you'd hardly believe—*real*, *dreadful* annoyances. I tell you, Tom, I hate the life I'm leading. You only see the upper surface, and hardly that. I'm worried to death, and only that I owe so much money, and can't get away, I can tell you—I don't care two pins whether you believe it or not—I should have been feeding sheep in Australia a year ago."

"Better where you are, Cleve."

"How the devil do *you* know? Don't be offended with me, Tom, only make allowances, and if I sometimes talk a bit like a Bedlamite, don't repeat my ravings; that's all. Look at that windmill; isn't it pretty?"

CHAPTER XLVII.

LADY DORMINSTER'S BALL.

Cleve Verney was in harness again—attending the House with remarkable punctuality; for the eye of the noble peer, his uncle, was upon him. He had the division lists regularly on his table, and if Cleve's name was missing from any one of even moderate importance, his uncle took leave to ask an explanation. Cleve had also reasons of his own for working diligently at the drudgery of public life. His march was not upon solid ground, but over a quaking bog, every undulation and waver of which was answered by a qualm at his heart.

Still it was only some nice management of time and persons; it was a mere matter of presence of mind, of vigilance, of resource, to which he felt—at least hoped—he might be found equal, and all *must* end well. Was not his uncle sixty-six his last birth-day? People might flatter and say he looked nothing like it; but the red book so pronounced, and there is no gainsaying that sublime record. After all, his uncle was not an everlasting danger. Time and the hour will end the longest day; and then must come the title, and estates, and a quiet heart at last.

When the House did not interfere, Cleve was of course seen at all the proper places. On the night of which I am now speaking there was among others Lady Dorminster's ball, and a brilliant muster of distinguished persons.

On that crowded floor, in those celebrated saloons, in an atmosphere of light and music, in which moved so much of what is famous, distinguished, splendid, is seen the figure of Cleve Verney. Everyone knew that slight and graceful figure, and the oval face, delicate features, and large, dark, dreamy eyes, that never failed to impress you with the same ambiguous feeling. It was Moorish, it was handsome; but there was a shadow there—something secret and selfish, and smilingly, silently insolent.

This session he had come out a little, and made two speeches of real promise. The ministers had complimented his uncle upon them, and had also complimented him. The muse was there; something original and above routine—genius perhaps—and that passion for distinction which breaks a poor man's heart, and floats the rich to greatness.

A man of Cleve's years, with his position, with his promise, with London

life and Paris life all learned by rote, courted and pursued, wary, contemptuous, sensual, clever, ambitious—is not young. The whole chaperon world, with its wiles, was an open book for him. For him, like the man in the German legend, the earth under which they mined and burrowed had grown to his eyes transparent, and he saw the gnomes at work. For him young ladies' smiles were not light and magic—only marsh fires and tricks. To him old and young came up and simpered or fawned; but they dimpled or ogled or grinned, all in the Palace of Truth. Truth is power, but not always pretty. For common men the surface is best; all beyond that is knowledge—an acquisition of sorrow.

Therefore, notwithstanding his years, the clear olive oval of his handsome face, the setting—void of line or colour—of those deep dark eyes, so enthusiastic, yet so cold, the rich wave of his dark hair, and the smooth transparency of temples and forehead, and all the tints and signs of beautiful youth, Cleve Verney was well stricken in years of knowledge; and of that sad gift he would not have surrendered an iota in exchange for the charms and illusions of innocence, so much for the most part do men prefer power to happiness.

"How d'ye do, Miss Oldys?" said this brilliant young man of actualities and expectations.

"Oh, Mr. Verney, *you* here!"

This pretty Caroline Oldys was just five-and-twenty, and in her sixth London season. Old, like him, in the world's dismal psycology, betrayed into a transient surprise, smiling in genuine gladness, almost forgetting herself, and looking quite country-girlish in the momentary effusion. It is not safe affecting an emotion with men like Cleve, especially when it does not flatter them. He did not care a farthing whether she was surprised or not, or glad or sorry. But her very eye and gesture told him that she had marked him as he stood there, and had chosen the very seat on which her partner had placed her of malice aforethought. Fine acting does it need to succeed with a critic like Cleve.

"Yes, I here—and where's the wonder?"

"Why,—who was it?—*some* one told me only half an hour ago, you were somewhere in France."

"Well, if it was a man he told a story, and if a lady she made a mistake," said Cleve, cooly but tartly, looking steadily at her. "And the truth is, I wanted a yacht, and I went down to look at her, tried her, liked her, and bought her. Doesn't it sound very like a marriage?"

Ethel laughed.

"That's your theory—we're all for sale, and handed over to the best bidder."

"Pretty valtz," said Cleve, waving his slender hand just the least in the world to the music. "Pretty thing!"

He did not use much ceremony with this young lady—his cousin in some remote way—who, under the able direction of her mother, Lady Wimbledon, had once pursued him in a barefaced way for nearly three years; and who, though as we have seen, her mother had by this time quite despaired, yet liked him with all the romance that remained to her.

"And who are you going to marry, Caroline? There's Sedley—I see him over there. What do you say to Sedley?"

"No, thanks—much obliged—but Sedley, you know, has seen his fate in that mysterious lady in Wales, or somewhere. I once had a letter from him."

"Oh! has he?" He signed to Sedley to come to them.

Looking through the chinks and chasms that now and then opened in the distinguished mob of which he formed a unit, he occasionally saw the stiff figure and small features of his pompous uncle, Lord Verney, who was talking affably to Lady Wimbledon, whom he used to hate. Lord Verney did not wear his agreeable simper. He had that starch and dismal expression, rather, which came with grave subjects, and he was tapping the fingers of his right hand upon the back of his left, in time to the cadence of his periods, which he did when delivering matter particularly well worth hearing. It plainly did not displease Lady Wimbledon, whatever his discourse might be. "I'm to be married to Caroline, I suppose. I wish that old woman was at the bottom of the red sea."

Cleve looked straight in the eyes

of the Honorable Miss Oldys, and said he, with a smile, "Lady Wimbledon and my uncle are deep in some mystery—is it political? Have you an idea?"

Caroline Oldys had given up blushing very long ago indeed; but there was the confusion, without the tint of a blush in her face, as he said these words.

"I dare say—mamma's a great politician."

"Oh! I know that. By Jove, my uncle's looking this way. I hope he's not coming."

"Would you mind taking me to mamma?"

"No—pray stay for a moment. Here's Sedley."

And the young man, whom we know pretty well, with the bold blue eyes and golden moustaches, and good frank handsome face, approached smiling.

"How are you, Sedley?" said Cleve, giving him two fingers. "Caroline Oldys says you've had an adventure. Where was it?"

"The lady in black, you know, in Wales," reminded Miss Oldys.

"Oh! to be sure," said Sedley, laughing. "A lady in gray, it was. I saw her twice. But that's more than a year old, and there has been nothing ever since."

"*Do* go on."

Sedley laughed.

"It was at Cardyllian, in the church. She lived at Malory—that dark old place you went to see with the Verneys, the day you were at Cardyllian—don't you remember?'

"Oh, yes, what a romantic place!"

"With an awfully cross old fellow, old enough to be her father, but with the air of her husband, guarding her like a dragon, and eyeing every fellow that came near as if he'd knock him down; a lean, white-whiskered, bald old fellow, with bushy eyebrows, and a fierce face, and eyes jumping out of his head, and lame of one foot, too. Not a beauty by any means."

"Where did you see *him?*" said Cleve.

"I did not see him—but Christmas Jones the boatman told me."

"Well, and which is your fate—which is to kill you—the husband or wife?" inquired Cleve, looking vaguely among the crowd.

"Oh, the wife, as he calls her, is really quite beautiful, melancholy and that, you know. I'd have found out all about them, but they left before I had time to go back, but Verney was at Cardyllian, when I was there."

"When was that?" asked Cleve.

"I mean when these people were at Malory. Cleve was much more gone about her than I was—at least so I've heard," answered Sedley.

"That's very ungrateful of you, Sedley. I never interfered, upon my honour. I saw her once in church, and accompanied him in his pursuit at his earnest request, and I never saw her again. Are you going on to the Halbury's, Caroline?"

"Yes; are you?"

"No, quite used up. Haven't slept since Wednesday night."

Here a partner came to claim Miss Caroline.

"I'll go with you," said Sedley.

"Very well," answered Cleve without looking back. "Come to my lodgings, Sedley—we'll smoke, shall we? I've some capital cigars."

"I don't care. I'm going on, also."

"What a delicious night!" exclaimed Tom Sedley, looking up at the stars. "Suppose we walk—it isn't far."

"I don't care—let us walk," said Cleve.

So walk they did. It was not far to Cleve's lodgings, in a street off Piccadilly. The young men had walked rather silently; for, as it seemed to Sedley, his companion was not in a temper to talk a great deal, or very pleasantly.

"And what about this gray woman? Did the romance take fire where it ought? Is it a mutual flame?" asked Cleve, like a tired man who feels he must say something, and does not care what. "I don't think you mentioned her since the day you showed me that Beatrice Cenci, over your d—d chimney-piece."

"Of course I'd have told you if there had been anything to tell," said Tom.

"They haven't been at Malory since?"

"Oh! no—frightened away—you'll never see them there again. There's nothing absolutely in it, and never was, not even an adventure," continued Sedly. "She's a wonderfully beautiful creature, though; I wish you saw her again, Cleve. You're such

a clever fellow, you'd make a poem out of her, or something—she'd bring you back to the days of chivalry, and that style of thing. I'm a sort of a fellow, you know, that feels a lot, and I think, I *think* some too; but I haven't the knack of saying it, or writing it—I'm not particularly good at anything; but I went that morning, you know, into the Refectory—you know—there are such a lot of stairs, and long places and doors, it makes a fellow quite foolish—and there she was—I wish I could describe her to you."

"Don't try—you've tried so often—there's a good fellow; but just tell me what is her name?" said Cleve looking straight before him, above the lamps and the slanting slates and chimneys, into the deep sky, where brilliantly, spite of London smoke, shone the clear sad moon.

"Her name?—I never found out, except Margaret—I don't know; but I believe they did not want their name told."

"That did not look well—did it?" suggested Cleve.

"Well, no more it generally does; but it is not her fault. It was—in fact it was—old Sir Booth Fanshawe, you know he's broken—not worth a guinea—and always running about from place to place to avoid pursuit, in fact. It can't signify, you know, now that I think of it, mentioning him, because, of course, he's gone somewhere else long ago."

So said romantic little Sedley, and Cleve sneered.

"I see you can tell a fib on occasion, Tom, like another man. So you found out the name, and knew it all the time you were protesting ignorance. And who told you *that?* People here thought Sir Booth had gone to Italy."

"Well, it was, but you mustn't tell him I told you. There was a Jew fellow down at Malory, with a writ and a lot of fellows to nab him; but the old fellow was off; and the Jew thinking that Wynne Williams knew where he was, came to his office and offered him a hatfull of money to tell, and he was going to kick him out; and that's the way *he* found out it was old Sir Booth; and he is awfully afraid of getting into a scrape about it, if the old people heard who the tenant was."

"So he would—the worst scrape he ever was in, with my *uncle*, at all events. And that d—d Larkin would get into the management of everything, I suppose. I hope, you have not been telling everyone?"

"Not a soul—not a human being."

"There are some of the Cardyllian people that hardly come under that term; and, by Jove, if you breathe it to one of them, it's all over the town, and my uncle will be sure to hear it; and poor Wynne Williams!—you'll be the ruin of him very likely."

"I tell you, except to you, I *swear* to you, I haven't mentioned it to a soul on earth," exclaimed Tom.

"Well, I do think, as a matter of conscience and fairness, you ought to hold your tongue, and keep faith with poor Wynne," said Cleve, rudely, "and I think he was a monstrous fool to tell you. You know I'm interested," continued Cleve, perceiving that his vehemence surprised Tom Sedley; "because I have no faith in Larkin—I think him a sneak and a hypocrite, and a rogue—of course that's in confidence, and he's doing all in his power to get a fast hold of my uncle, and to creep into Wynne Williams's place, and a thing like this, with a hard unreasonable fellow like my uncle, would give him such a lift as you can't imagine."

"But, I'm not going to tell, unless *you* tell, or *he*, I don't know who's to tell it—*I* won't, I know.

"And about Sir Booth—of course he's not in England now—but neither is he in Italy," said Tom.

"It's well he has you to keep his 'log' for him," said Cleve.

"He's in France."

"Oh!"

"Yes, in the north of France, somewhere near Caen," said Tom Sedley.

"I wonder you let him get so near England. It seems rather perilous, doesn't it?"

"So one would think, but *there* he is. Tom Blackmore, of the Guards, you know him?"

"No, I don't."

"Well he saw old Fanshawe there. He happened to be on leave."

"Old Fanshawe?"

"No, Tom Blackmore. He likes poking into out-of-the-way places."

"I dare say."

"He has such a turn for the picturesque and all that, and draws very nicely."

"The long bow, I dare say."

"Well, no matter, he was there—Old Fanshawe I mean—Blackmore saw him. He knows his appearance perfectly—used to hunt with his hounds, and that kind of thing, and often talked to him, so he could not be mistaken—and there he was as large as life."

"Well?"

"He did not know Tom a bit, and Tom asked no questions—in fact, he did not care to know where the poor old fellow hides himself—he preferred not—but Madame something or other—I forget her name—gave him a history, about as true as Jack the Giant-Killer, of the eccentric English gentleman, and told him that he had taken a great old house, and had his family there, and a most beautiful young wife, and was as jealous as fifty devils; so you see Margaret must have been there. Of course that was she," said Tom.

"And you said so to your friend Blackmore?" suggested Cleve Verney.

"Yes," said Tom, "there was no harm in *that*. She's not in danger of those d—d writs and things."

"It seems to me you want to have him caught."

"Well, I don't see."

"Why, saying that had just *this* advantage. That prating Guardsman was sure to talk of the matter when you gave him that subject, although he would probably never have thought again of having seen old Fanshawe, as you call Sir Booth, in France, if it had not been for that."

"Well, I did not think—I hope not—and I did not know you took any interest in him," said Sedley, quite innocently.

"Interest! *I*—me! Interest, indeed! Why the devil should *I* take an interest in Sir Booth Fanshawe? Why you seem to forget all the trouble and annoyance he has cost me. Interest, indeed! Quite the contrary. Only, I think, one would not like to get any poor devil into worse trouble than he's in, for no object, or to be supposed to be collecting information about him."

"No one could suppose anything like that of me," said Tom Sedley.

"I beg your pardon; they can suppose anything of anybody," answered Cleve, and, seeing that Tom looked offended, he added, "and the more absurd and impossible, the more likely with some people. I wish you heard the things that have been said of *me*—enough to make your hair stand on end, by Jove!"

"Oh! I dare say."

They were now turning into the street where Cleve had taken lodgings.

"I could not stand those fellows any longer. My uncle has filled the house with them—varnish and paint and that stifling plaster—so I've put up here for a little time."

"I like these streets. I'm not very far away from you here," said Tom. "And talking of that affair at Caen, you know, he said, by Jove he did, that he saw *you* there."

"Who said?"

"Tom Blackmore of the Guards."

"Then Tom Blackmore of the Guards *lies*—that's all. You may tell him I said so. I never saw him—I never spoke to him—I don't know him; and how should he know me? And if he did, I wasn't there; and if I had been, what the devil was it to him? So besides telling lies, he tells *impertinent* lies, and he ought to be kicked."

"Well, of course as you say so, he must have made a mistake; but Caen is as open to you as to him, and there's no harm in the place; and he knows you by appearance."

"He knows everybody by appearance, it seems, and nobody knows him; and, by Jove, he describes more like a bailiff than a Guardsman."

"He's a thorough gentleman in every *idea*. Tom Blackmore is as nice a little fellow as there is in the world," battled Tom Sedley for his friend.

"Well, I wish you'd persuade that faultless gentleman to let me and my concerns alone. I have a reason in this case; and I don't mind if I tell you, I *was* at Caen, and I suppose he *did* see me. But there was no romance in the matter, except the romance of the Stock Exchange and a Jew; and I wish, Tom, you'd just consider *me* as much as you do the old baronet, for my own sake, that is, for *I*'m pretty well dipt too, and don't want everyone to know when or where I go in quest of my Jews. I *was* not very far from that about four months ago; and if you go about telling everyone, by Jove my uncle

will guess what brought me there, and old fellows don't like *post-obits* on their own lives."

"My dear Cleve, I had not a notion——"

"Well, all you can do for me now, having spread the report, is to say that I *was*n't there—I'm serious. Here we are."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A LARK.

"THERE'S some 'Old Tom,' isn't there? Get it, and glasses and cold water, *here*," said Cleve to his servant, who, patient, polite, sleepy, awaited his master. "You used to like it—and here are cigars;" and he shook out a shower upon his drawing-room table cover. "And where did you want to go at this time of night?"

"To Wright's, to see the end of the great game of billiards—Seller and Culverin, you know; I've two pounds on it."

"Don't care if I go with you, just now. What's this?—When the devil did this come?" Cleve had picked up and at one pale glance read a little note that lay on the table; and then he repeated coolly enough—

"I say, when did this come?"

"Before one, sir, I think," said Shepperd.

"Get me my coat," and Shepperd disappeared.

"Pestered to *death* about money," he said, moodily. "Upon my soul, I think if my uncle *will* make a statesman of me, he ought in conscience to enable me to *live* without selling my vote; see, you have got the things here, and cigars. I sha'n't be five minutes away. If I'm longer, don't wait for me; but finish this first."

Cleve had turned up the collar of his outer coat, and buttoned it across his chin, and pulled a sort of travelling cap down on his brows, and let the silk flaps cover his cheeks, and away he went.

He did not come back in five minutes; nor in ten, twenty, or forty minutes. The "Old Tom" in the bottle had run low; Sedley looked at his watch; he could wait no longer.

When he got out upon the flagway, though not quite tipsy, he felt the agreeable stimulus of the curious "Old Tom" sufficiently to render a little pause expedient for the purpose of calling to mind with clearness the geographical bearings of Wright's billiard-rooms—whither accordingly—eastward, along deserted and echoing streets, with here and there a policeman poking into an area, or sauntering along his two-mile-an-hour duty, march, and now and then regaled by the unearthly music of love-sick cats among the roofs.

These streets and squares, among which he had in a manner lost himself, had in their day been the haunts and quarters of fashion, a fairy world, always migrating before the steady march of business. Sedley had quite lost his reckoning. If he had been content to go by Ludgate-hill, he would have been at Wright's half an hour before. Sedley did not know these dingy and respectable old squares; he had not even seen a policeman for the last twenty minutes, and was just then quite of the Irish lawyer's opinion that life is not long enough for short-cuts.

In a silent street he passed a carriage standing near a lamp. The driver on the flagway looked hard at him. Sedley was not a romantic being only; he had also his waggish mood, and loved a lark when it came. He returned the fellow's stare with a glance as significant, slackening his pace.

"Well?" said Sedley.

"Well!" replied the driver.

"Capital!" answered Sedley.

"Be you him?" demanded the driver, after a pause.

"No; be *you?*" answered Sedley.

The driver seemed a little puzzled, and eyed Sedley doubtfully; and Sedley looked into the carriage, which, however, was empty, and then at the house at whose rails it stood; but it was dark from top to bottom.

He had thoughts of stepping in and availing himself of the vehicle; but seeing no particular fun in the procedure, and liking better to walk, he

merely said, nodding toward the carriage—

"Lots of room."

"Room enough, I dessay."

"How long do you mean to wait?"

"As long as I'm paid for."

"Give my love to your mother."

"Feard she won't vally it."

"Take care of yourself for my sake."

Doubtless there was a retort worthy of so sprightly a dialogue; but Sedly could not hear distinctly as he paced on, looking up at the moon, and thinking how beautifully she used to shine, and was no doubt then shining, on the flashing blue sea at Cardyllian, and over the misty mountains. And he thought of his pretty cousin Agnes Etherage; and "Yes," said he within himself, quickening his pace, "if I win that two pounds at Wright's, I'll put two pounds to it, the two pounds I should have lost, that is—there's nothing extravagant in that—and bring little Agnes something pretty; I said I would; and though it was only joke, still it's a promise."

Sedley was a good-natured fellow. Some tradesmen's bills that morning had frightened him, and as he periodically did, he had bullied himself into resolutions of economy, out of which he ingeniously reasoned himself again. "What shall it be? I'll look in tomorrow at Dymock and Rose's—they have lots of charming little French trifles. Where the deuce are we now?"

He paused, and looking about him, and then down a stable-lane between two old-fashioned houses of handsome dimensions, he saw a fellow in a great coat loitering slowly down it, and looking up vigilantly at the two or three windows in the side of the mansion.

"A robbery, by George!" thought Sedley, as he marked the prowling vigilance of the man, and his peculiar skulking gait.

He had no sort of weapon about him, not even a stick; but he is one of the best sparrers extant, of his weight, and thinks pluck and "a fistfull of fives" well worth a revolver.

Sedley hitched his shoulders, plucked off the one glove that remained on, and followed him softly a few steps, dogging him down the lane, with that shrewd, stern glance which men exchange in the prize ring. But when on turning about the man in the surtout saw that he was observed, he confirmed Sedley's suspicions by first pausing irresolutely, and ultimately withdrawing suddenly round the angle.

Sedley had not expected this tactique. For whatever purpose, the man had been plainly watching the house, and it was nearly three o'clock. Thoroughly blooded now for a "lark," Sedley followed swiftly to the corner, but could not see him; so, as he returned, a low window in the side-wall opened, and a female voice said, "Are you there?"

"Yes," replied Tom Sedley, confidentially drawing near.

"Take this."

"All right"—and thereupon he received first a bag and then a box, each tolerably heavy.

Sedley was amused. A mystification had set in; a quiet robbery, and he the receiver. He thought of dropping the booty down the area of the respectable house round the corner, but just then the man in the surtout emerged from the wing, so to speak, and marching slowly up the perspective of the lane, seemed about to disturb him, but once more changed his mind, and disappeared.

"What is to happen next?" wondered Tom Sedley. In a few minutes a door which opens from the back yard or garden of the house from which he had received his burthen, opened cautiously, and a woman in a black cloak stepped out, carrying another bag, a heavy one it also seemed, and beckoning to him, said, so soon as he was sufficiently near,

"Is the carriage come?"

"Yes'm," answered Tom, touching his hat, and affecting as well as he could the ways of a porter or a cabman.

"When they comes," she resumed, "you'll bring us to where it is, mind, and fetch the things with you—and mind ye, no noise nor talking, and walk as light as you can."

"All right," said Tom, in the same whisper in which she spoke.

It could not be a robbery—Tom had changed his mind; there was an air of respectability about the servant that conflicted with that theory, and the discovery that the carriage was waiting to receive the party was also against it.

Tom was growing more interested in his adventure; and entering into the fuss and mystery of the plot.

"Come round, please, and show me where the carriage stands," said the woman, beckoning to Tom, who followed her round the corner.

She waited for him, and laid her hand on his elbow, giving him a little jog by way of caution.

"Hush—not a word above your breath, mind," she whispered; "*I* see that's it; well, it needn't come no nearer, mind."

"All right, ma'am."

"And there's the window," she added in a still more cautious whisper, and pointing with a nod and a frown at a window next the hall-door, through the shutter of which a dim light was visible.

"Ha!" breathed Tom, looking wise, "and all safe *there?*"

"We're never sure; sometimes awake; sometimes not; sometimes quiet; sometimes quite wild-like; and the window pushed open, for hair! Hoffle he is!"

"And always was," hazarded Tom.

"Wuss now, though," whispered she, shaking her head ruefully, and she returned round the angle of the house and entered the door through which she had issued, and Tom set down his load not far from the same point.

Before he had waited many minutes the same door re-opened, and two ladies, as he judged them to be from something in their air and dress, descended the steps together, followed by the maid carrying the black-leather bag as before. They stopped just under the door, which the servant shut cautiously and locked; and then these three female figures stood for a few seconds whispering together; and after that they turned and walked up the lane towards Tom Sedley, who touched his hat as they approached, and lifted his load again.

"The two ladies were muffled in cloaks. The taller wore no hat or bonnet; but had instead a shawl thrown over her head and shoulders, hood-wise. She walked, leaning upon the shorter lady, languidly, like a person very weak, or in pain, and the maid at the other side, placed her arm tenderly round her waist, under her mufflers, and aided her thus as she walked. They crossed the street at the end of the stable-lane, and walked at that side toward the carriage. The maid signed to Tom, who carried his luggage quickly to its destination on the box, and was in time to open the carriage door.

"Don't you mind," said the woman, putting Tom unceremoniously aside, and herself aiding the taller lady into the old-fashioned carriage. As she prepared to mount, Tom for a moment fancied a recognition; something in the contour of the figure, muffled as it was for a second struck him; and at the same moment all seemed like a dream, and he stepped backward involuntarily in amazement. Had he not seen the same gesture. The arm moved backward, exactly so, and that slender hand in a gardening glove, holding a tiny trowel, under the dark transparent foliage of old trees?

The momentary gesture was gone. The lady leaning back, a muffled figure, in the corner of the carriage, silent. Her companion, who he thought looked sharply at him, from within, now seated beside her; and the maid also from her place inside, told him from the window—

"Bid him drive now where he knows, quickly," and she pulled up the window.

Tom was too much interested now to let the thread of his adventure go. So to the box beside the driver he mounted, and delivered the order he had just received.

Away he drove swiftly, Citywards, through silent and empty streets. Tom quickly lost his bearings; the gas-lamps grew few and far between; he was among lanes and arches, and sober, melancholy streets, such as he had never suspected of an existence in such a region.

Here the driver turned suddenly up a narrow way between old brick walls, with tufts of dingy grass here and there at top, and the worn mortar lines overlaid with velvet moss. This short passage terminated in two tall brick piers, surmounted by worn and moss-grown urns of stone.

Tom jumped down and pushed back the rusty iron gates, and they drove into an unlighted, melancholy courtyard; and Tom thundered at a tall narrow hall-door, between chipped

and worn pilasters of the same white stone, surmounted by some carved heraldry, half effaced.

Standing on the summit of the steps he had to repeat his summons, till the cavernous old mansion pealed again with the echo, before a light gave token of the approach of a living being to give them greeting.

Tom opened the carriage door, and let down the steps, perhaps a little clumsily, but he was getting through his duties wonderfully.

The party entered the spacious wainscoted hall, in which was an old wooden bench, on which, gladly, it seemed, the sick lady sat herself down. A great carved doorway, opened upon a square second hall or lobby, through which the ray of the single candle glanced duskily, and touched the massive banisters of a broad staircase.

This must have been the house of a very great man in its day, a Lord Chancellor, perhaps, one of those Hogarthian mansions in which such men as my Lord Squanderfield might have lived in the first George's days.

"How could any man have been such an idiot," thought Sedley, filled with momentary wonder, "as to build a palace like this in such a place?"

"Dear me! what a place—what a strange place!" whispered the elder and shorter lady, "where are we to go?"

"Up stairs, please'm," said the woman with a brass candlestick in her hand.

"I hope there's fire, and more light, and—and proper comfort there?"

"Oh! yes'm, please; everythink as you would like, please."

"Come, dear," said the old lady tenderly, giving her arm to the languid figure resting in the hall.

So guided and lighted by the servant they followed her up the great well staircase.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A NEW VOICE.

The ladies ascended, led by the maid with the candle, and closely followed by their own servant, and our friend Tom Sedley brought up the rear, tugging the box and the bag with him.

At the stair-head was a great gallery from which many doors opened. Tom Sedley halted close by the banister for orders, depositing his luggage beside him. The maid set the candle down upon a table, and opened one of these tall doors, through which he saw an angle of the apartment, a fire burning in the grate, and a pleasant splendour of candlelight; he saw that the floor was carpeted, and the windows curtained, and though there was disclosed but a corner of a large room, there were visible such pieces of furniture as indicated general comfort.

In a large arm-chair, at the further side of the fire-place, sat the lady who had thrilled him with a sudden remembrance. She had withdrawn the shawl that hung in hood-like fashion over her head, and there was no longer a doubt. The Beatrice Cenci was there—his Guido—very pale, dying he thought her, with her white hands clasped, and her beautiful eyes turned upward in an agony of prayer.

The old lady, Miss Sheckleton, came near her, leaned over her, kissed her tenderly, and caressingly smoothed her rich chestnut hair over her temples, and talked gently in her ear, and raised her hand in both hers, and kissed it, and drawing a chair close to hers, she sat by her, murmuring in her ear with a countenance of such kindness and compassion, that Tom Sedley loved her for it.

Looking up, Miss Sheckleton observed the door open, and Tom fancied perceived him in the perspective through it, for she rose suddenly, shut it, and he saw no more. Tom had not discovered in the glance of the old lady any sign of recognition, and for the sake of appearances he had buttoned his gray wrapper close across his throat and breast so as to conceal the evidences of his ball costume; his shining boots, however, were painfully conspicuous, but for that incongruity there was no help.

And now the servant who had let them in told Tom to bring the box and bag into the servants' room,

to which she led him across the gallery.

There was a large fire, which was pleasant, a piece of matting on the floor, a few kitchen utensils ranged near the fire-place, a deal table, and some common kitchen chairs. Dismal enough would the room have looked, notwithstanding its wainscoting, had it not been for the glow diffused by the fire.

By this fire, on a kitchen chair, and upon his own opera hat, which he wished specially to suppress, sat Tom Sedley, resolved to see his adventure one hour or so into futurity, before abandoning it, and getting home to his bed, and in the meantime doing his best to act a servant, as he fancied such a functionary would appear in his moments of ease unbending in the kitchen or the servants' hall. The maid who had received the visiters in the hall, Anne Evans by name, square, black-haired, slightly pitted with small-pox, and grave, came and sat down at the other side of the fire, and eyed Tom Sedley in silence.

Now and then Tom felt uncomfortably about his practical joke, which was degenerating into a deception. But an hour or so longer could not matter much; and might he not make himself really useful if the services of a messenger were required?

Anne Evans was considering him in silence, and he turned a little more toward the fire, and poked it, as he fancied a groom would poke a fire for his private comfort.

"Are you servant to the ladies?" at last she asked.

Tom smiled at the generality of the question, but interpreting in good faith—

"No," said he, "I came with the carriage."

"Servant to the gentleman?" she asked.

"What gentleman?"

"You know well."

Tom had not an idea, but could not well say so. He therefore poked the fire again, and said, "Go on, miss; I'm listening."

She did not go on, however, for some time, and then it was to say—

"My name is Anne Evans. What may your name be?"

"Can't tell that. I left my name at home," said Tom, mysteriously.

"Won't tell?"

"Can't."

"I'm only by the month. Come in just a week to-morrow," observed Anne Evans.

"They'll not part you in a month, Miss Evans. No; they has some taste and feelin' among them. I wouldn't wonder if you was here for ever!" said Tom, with enthusiasm; "and what's this place, miss—this house I mean—whose house is it?"

"Can't say, only I hear it's bought for a brewery, to be took down next year."

"Oh, criky!" said Tom; "that's a pity."

There was a short pause.

"I saw you 'ide your 'at," said Anne Evans.

"Not 'ide it," said Tom—only sits on it—always sits on my 'at."

Tom produced it, let it bounce up like a jack-in-a-box, and shut it down again.

Miss Evans was neither amused nor surprised.

"Them's hopera 'ats—first quality—they used to come in boxes on 'em, as long as from here to you, when I was at Mr. Potterton's, the hatter. Them's for gents—they air—and not for servants."

"The gov'nor gives me his old uns," said Tom, producing the best fib he could find.

"And them French boots," she added, meditatively.

"Perquisite likewise," said Tom.

Miss Anne Evans closed her eyes, and seemed disposed to take a short nap in her chair. But on a sudden she opened her eyes to say—

"I think you're the gentleman himself."

"The old gentleman?" said Tom.

"No. The young un."

"I'm jest what I tell you, not objectin' to the compliment all the same," said Tom.

"And a ring on your finger?"

"A ring on my finger—yes. I wear it two days in the week. My grand-uncle's ring, who was a gentleman, being skipper of a coal brig."

"What's the lady's name?"

"Can't tell, Miss Evans; dussn't."

"Fuss about nothin'!" said she, and closed her eyes again, and opened them in a minute more, to add, "but I think you're him, and that's *my* belief."

"No, I ain't, miss, as you'll see by-and-by."

"Tisn't nothin' to me, only people *is* so close."

The door opened, and a tall woman in black, with a black net cap on, came quietly but quickly into the room.

"You're the man?" said she, with an air of authority, fixing her eyes askance on Tom.

"Yes 'm, please."

"Well, you don't go on no account, for you'll be wanted just now."

"No, ma'am."

"Where's the box and bag you're in charge of?"

"Out here," said Tom.

"Hish, man, quiet; don't you know there's sickness? Walk easy, *can't* you? *please*, consider."

Tom followed her almost on tip-toe to the spot where the parcels lay.

"Gently now; into this room, please," and she led the way into that sitting-room into which Tom Sedly had looked some little time since, from the stair head.

The beautiful young lady was gone, but Miss Sheckleton was standing at the further door of the room with her hands clasped, and her eyes raised in prayer, and her pale cheeks wet with tears.

Hearing the noise, she gently closed the door, and hastily drying her eyes, whispered, "set them down *there*," pointing to a sofa, on which Tom placed them accordingly. "Thanks—that will do. You may go."

When Sedley had closed the door—

"Oh, Mrs. Graver," whispered Anne Sheckleton, clasping her wrists in her trembling fingers, "is she *very* ill?"

"Well, ma'am, she *is* ill."

"But, oh, my God, you don't think we are going to lose her?" she whispered wildly, with her imploring gaze in the nurse's eyes.

"Oh, no, please God, ma'am, it will all be right. You must not fuss yourself, ma'am. You must not let her see you like this, on no account."

"Shall I send for him now?"

"No, ma'am; he'd only be in the way. *I*'ll tell you when; and his man's here, ready to go, any minute. I must go back to her now, ma'am. Hish!"

And Mrs. Graver disappeared with a little rustle of her dress, and no sound of steps. That solemn bird floated very noiselessly round sick beds, and you only heard, as it were, the hovering of her wings.

And then, in a minute more, in glided Miss Sheckleton, having dried her eyes very carefully.

And now came a great knocking at the hall door, echoing dully through the house. It was Doctor Grimshaw, who had just got his coat off, and was winding his watch, when he was called from his own bed-side by this summons, and so was here after a long day's work, to make a new start, and await the dawn in this chamber of pain.

In he came, and Miss Sheckleton felt that light and hope entered the room with him. Florid, portly, genial, with a light, hopeful step, and a good, decided, cheery manner, he inspired confidence, and seemed to take command, not only of the case, but of the ailment itself.

Miss Sheckleton knew this good doctor, and gladly shook his hand; and he recognised her with a hesitating look that seemed to ask a question, but was not meant to do so, and he spoke cheerfully to the patient, and gave his directions to the nurse, and in about half an hour more told good Anne Sheckleton that she had better leave the patient.

So, with the docility which an able physician inspires, good Anne Sheckleton obeyed, and in the next room—sometimes praying, sometimes standing and listening, sometimes wandering from point to point, in the merest restlessness—she waited and watched for more than an hour, which seemed to her longer than a whole night, and at last tapped very gently at the door, a lull having come for a time in the sick chamber, and unable longer to endure her suspense.

A little bit of the door was opened, and Anne Sheckleton saw the side of Mrs. Graver's straight nose, and one of her wrinkled eyes, and her grim mouth.

"How is she?" whispered Miss Sheckleton, feeling as if she was herself about to die.

"Pretty well, ma'am," answered the nurse, but with an awful look of insincerity, under which the old lady's heart sank down and down, as if it had foundered.

"One word to Dr. Grimshaw," she whispered, with white lips.

"You *can't*, ma'am," murmured the nurse, sternly, and about to shut the door in her face.

"Wait, *wait*," whispered the voice of kind old Doctor Grimshaw, and he came into the next room to Miss Sheckleton, closing the door after him.

"Oh, doctor!" she gasped.

"Well, Miss Sheckleton, I hope she'll do very well; I've just given her something—a slight stimulant—and I've every confidence everything will be well. Don't make yourself uneasy; it is not going on badly.

"Oh, Doctor Grimshaw, shall I send for him? He'd never forgive me; and I promised her, darling Margaret, to send."

"*Don't* send—on *no account* yet. Don't bring him here—he's better away. I'll tell you when to send."

The Doctor opened the door.

"Still quiet?"

"Yes, sir," whispered Mrs. Graver.

Again he closed the door.

"Nice creature she seems. A relation of yours?" asked the Doctor.

"My cousin."

"When was she married?"

"About a year ago."

"Never any tendency to consumption?"

"Never."

"Nothing to make her low or weak? Is she hysterical?"

"No hardly that, but nervous and excitable."

"I know; very good. I think she'll do very nicely. If anything goes the least wrong I'll let you know. Now stay quiet in there."

And he shut the door, and she heard his step move softly over the next room floor, so great was the silence, and she kneeled down and prayed as people have prayed in shipwrecks; and more time passed, and more, slowly, very slowly. Oh, would the dawn ever come, and the daylight again?

Voices and moans she heard from the room. Again she prayed on her knees to the throne of mercy, in the agony of her suspense, and now over the strange roofs spread the first faint gray of the coming dawn; and there came a silence in the room, and on a sudden was heard a new tiny voice crying.

"The little child!" cried old Anne Sheckleton, springing to her feet, with clasped hands, in the anguish of delight, and such a gush of tears as she looked up, thanking God, with her smiles, as comes only in such moments.

Margaret's clear voice faintly said something; Anne could not hear what.

"A boy," answered the cheering voice of Doctor Grimshaw.

"Oh! he'll be so glad!" answered the faint clear voice in a kind of rapture.

"Of course he will," replied the same cheery voice. And another question came, too low for old Anne Sheckleton's ears.

"A *beautiful* boy! as fine a fellow as ever you could desire to look at. Bring him here, nurse."

"Oh! the darling!" said the same faint voice. "I'm so *happy*."

"Thank God! thank God! thank God!" sobbed delighted Anne Sheckleton, her cheeks still streaming in showers of tears as she stood waiting at the door for the moment of admission, and hearing the sweet happy tones of Margaret's voice sounding in her ears like the voice of one who had just now died, heard faintly through the door of heaven.

For thus it has been, and thus to the end, it will be—the "sorrow" of the curse is remembered no more, "for joy that a man is born into the world."

CHAPTER L.

CLEVE COMES.

TOM SEDLEY was dozing in his chair, by the fire, when he was roused by Mrs. Graver's voice.

"You'll take this note at once, please, to your master; there's a cab at the door, and the lady says you mustn't make no delay."

It took some seconds to enable Tom to account for the scene, the actor and his own place of repose, his

costume, and the tenor of the strange woman's language. In a little while, however, he recovered the context, and the odd passage in his life became intelligible.

Still half asleep, Tom hurried down stairs, and in the hall, to his amazement, read the address, "Cleve Verney, Esq." At the hall-door steps he found a cab, into which he jumped, telling the man to drive to Cleve Verney's lodgings.

There were expiring lights in the drawing-room, the blinds of which were up, and as the cab stopped at the steps a figure appeared at one, and Cleve Verney opened the window and told the driver, "Don't mind knocking, I'll go down."

"Come up stairs," said Cleve, addressing Sedley, and mistaking him for the person whom he had employed.

Up ran Tom Sedley at his heels.

"Hollo! what brings *you* here?" said Cleve, when Tom appeared in the light of the candles. "You don't mean to say the ball has been going on till now—or is it a scrape?"

"Nothing—only this I've been commissioned to give you," and he placed Miss Sheckleton's note in his hand.

Cleve had looked woefully haggard and anxious as Tom entered. But his countenance changed now to an ashy paleness, and there was no mistaking his extreme agitation.

He opened the note—a very brief one it seemed—and read it.

"Thank God!" he said with a great sigh, and then he walked to the window and looked out, and returned again to the candles and read the note once more.

"How did you know I was up, Tom?"

"The lights in the windows."

"Yes. Don't let the cab go."

Cleve was getting on his coat, and speaking like a man in a dream.

"I say, Tom Sedley, how did you come by this note?" he said, with a sudden pause, and holding Miss Sheckleton's note in his fingers.

"Well, quite innocently," hesitated Sedley.

"How the devil was it, sir? Come, you may as well. By heaven, Sedley, you shall tell me the truth!"

Tom looked on his friend Cleve, and saw his eyes gleaming sharply on him, and his face white with a kind of terror.

"Of course I'll tell you, Cleve," said Tom, and with this exordium he stumbled honestly through his story, which by no means quieted Cleve Verney.

"You d——d little Paul Pry!" said he in an undertone very viciously through his teeth. "Well, you have got hold of a secret now, like the man in the iron chest, and by —— you had better keep it."

A man who half blames himself already, and is in a position which he hates and condemns, will stand a great deal more of hard language, and even of execration, than he would under any other imaginable circumstances.

"You can't blame me half as much as I do myself. I assure you, Cleve, I'm awfully sorry. It was the merest lark—at first—and then—when I saw that beautiful—that young lady—"

"Don't dare to talk of that lady any more; I'm her husband. *There*, you have it all, and if you whisper it to mortal you *may ruin* me; but one or other of us shall die for it!"

Cleve was talking in a state of positive exasperation.

"Whisper it!—tell it! You don't in the least understand me, Cleve," said Tom, collecting himself, and growing a little lofty; "I don't whisper or tell things; and as for daring or not daring, I don't know what you mean; and I hope, if occasion for *dying* came, I should funk it as little as any other fellow."

"I'm going to this d——d place now. I don't much care what you do: I almost wish you'd shoot me."

He struck his hand on the table, looking not at Tom Sedley, but with a haggard rage through the window, and away toward the cold, gray east; and without another word to Sedley, he ran down, shutting the hall-door with a crash that showed more of his temper than of his prudence, and Tom saw him jump into the cab and drive away.

The distance is really considerable, but in Cleve's intense reverie time and space contracted, and before he fancied they had accomplished half the way, he found himself at the tall door and stained pilasters and steps of the old red-brick house.

Anne Evans, half awake, awaited

his arrival on the steps. He ran lightly up the stairs; and, in obedience to Mrs. Graver's gesture of warning, as she met him with raised hand and her frowning "Hish" at the head of the stairs, he checked his pace, and in a whisper he made his eager inquiries. She was going on very nicely.

"I must see Miss Sheckleton—the old lady—where is she?" urged Cleve.

"Here, sir, please"—and Mrs. Graver opened a door, and he found tired Miss Sheckleton tying on her bonnet, and getting her cloak about her.

"Oh! Cleve, dear"—she called him "Cleve" now—"I'm so delighted; she's doing *very* well; the doctor's quite *pleased* with her, and it's a boy, Cleve, and—and I wish you joy with all my heart."

And as she spoke, the kind old lady was shaking both his hands, and smiling up into his handsome face, like sunshine; but that handsome face, though it smiled down darkly upon her, was, it seemed to her, strangely joyless, and even troubled.

"And Cleve, dear, my *dear* Mr. Verney—I'm *so* sorry; but I must go immediately. I make his chocolate in the morning, and he sometimes calls for it at half-past seven. This miserable attack that has kept him here, and the risk in which he is every day he stays in this town, it *is so* distracting. And if I should not be at home and ready to see him when he calls, he'd be sure to suspect something; and I really see nothing but ruin from his temper and violence to all of us, if he were to find out how it is. So good-bye, and God bless you. The Doctor says he thinks you may see her in a very little time—half an hour or so—if you are very careful not to let her excite or agitate herself; and—God bless you—I shall be back, for a little, in an hour or two."

So that kindly, fluttered, troubled, and happy old lady disappeared; and Cleve was left again to his meditations.

"Where's the Doctor?" asked Cleve of the servant.

"In the sitting-room, please, sir, writing; his carriage is come, sir, please."

And thus saying, Mistress Anne Evans officiously opened the door, and Cleve entered. The Doctor, having written a prescription, and just laid down his pen, was pulling on his glove.

Cleve had no idea that he was to see Doctor Grimshaw. Quite another physician, with whom he had no acquaintance, had been agreed upon between him and Miss Sheckleton. As it turned out, however, that gentleman was now away upon an interesting visit to a noble lady, at a country mansion, and Doctor Grimshaw was thus unexpectedly summoned.

Cleve was unpleasantly surprised, for he had already an acquaintance with that good man, which he fancied was not recorded in his recollection to his credit. I think if the Doctor's eye had not been directed toward the door when he entered, that Cleve Verney would have drawn back; but that would not do now.

"Doctor Grimshaw?" said Cleve.

"Yes, sir;" said the old gentleman.

"I think, Doctor Grimshaw, you know me?"

"Oh, yes, sir; of course I do;" said the Doctor, with an uncomfortable smile, ever so little bitter, and a slight bow, "Mr. Verney, yes." And the Doctor paused, looking toward him, pulling on his other glove, and expecting a question.

"Your patient, Doctor Grimshaw, doing very well, I'm told?"

"Nicely, sir—very nicely now. I was a little uncomfortable about her just at one time, but doing very well now; and it's a boy—a fine child. Good morning, sir."

He had taken up his hat.

"And, Doctor Grimshaw, just one word. May I beg, as a matter of professional *honour*, that this—all this, shall be held as strictly *secret*—everything connected with it as strictly confidential?"

The Doctor looked down on the carpet with a pained countenance. "Certainly, sir," he said, drily. "That's all, I suppose? Of course, Mr. Verney, I shan't—since such, I suppose to be the wish of all parties—mention the case."

"Of *all* parties, certainly; and it is in tenderness to others, not to myself, that I make the request."

"I'm sorry it should be necessary, sir;" said Doctor Grimshaw, almost sternly. "I know Miss Sheckleton and her family; this poor young lady,

I understand, is a cousin of her's. I am *sorry*, sir, upon her account, that any mystery should be desirable."

"It *is* desirable, and, in fact, *indispensable*, sir," said Cleve, a little stiffly, for he did not see what right that old doctor had to assume a lecturer's tone toward him.

"No one shall be compromised by me, sir," said the Doctor, with a sad and offended bow.

And the Doctor drove home pretty well tired out. I am afraid that Cleve did not very much care whom he might compromise, provided he himself were secure. But even from himself the utter selfishness, which toned a character passionate and impetuous enough to simulate quite unconsciously the graces of magnanimity and tenderness, was hidden.

Cleve fancied that the cares that preyed upon his spirits were for Margaret, and when he sometimes almost regretted their marriage, that his remorse was altogether for her, all his caution and finesse were exacted by his devotion to the interests of his young wife, and the long system of mystery and deception, under which her proud, frank spirit was pining, was practised solely for her advantage.

So Cleve was in his own mind something of a hero—self-sacrificing, ready, if need be, to shake himself free, for sake of his love and his liberty, of all the intoxications and enervations of his English life, and *fortis colonus*, to delve the glebe of Canada or to shear the sheep of Australia. She was not conscious that all these were the chimeras of insincerity, that ambition was the breath of his nostrils, and that his idol was —himself.

And if he mistakes himself, do not others mistake him also, and clothe him with the nobleness of their own worship? Can it be that the lights and the music and the incense that surround him are but the tributes of a beautiful superstition, and that the idol in the midst is cold and dumb?

Cleve, to do him justice, was moved on this occasion. He did—shall I say?—yearn to behold her again. There was a revival of tenderness, and he waited with a real impatience to see her.

He did see her—just a little gleam of light in the darkened room; he stood beside the bed, clasping that beautiful hand that God had committed to his, smiling down in that beautiful face that smiled unutterable love up again into his own.

"Oh! Cleve, darling—oh, Cleve! I'm so happy."

The languid hands are clasped on his, the yearning eyes, and the smile, look up. It is like the meeting of the beloved after shipwreck.

"And look, Cleve;" and with just ever so little a motion of her hand she draws back a silken coverlet, and he sees in a deep sleep a little baby, and the beautiful smile of young maternity falls upon it like a blessing and a caress. "Isn't it a darling? *Poor* little thing! how quietly it sleeps. I think it is the dearest little thing that ever was seen—*our* little baby!"

Is there a prettier sight than the young mother smiling, in this the hour of her escape, upon the treasure she has found? The wondrous gift, at sight of which a new love springs up—never—never, while life remains, to cease its flowing. Looking on such a sight in silence, I think I hear the feet of the angels round the bed —I think I see their beautiful eyes smiling on the face of the little mortal, and their blessed hands raised over the head of the fair young mother.

THE TENANTS OF MALORY.

BY J. S. LE FANU, AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," &c., &c.

CHAPTER LI.

"Teach me, ye groves, some art to ease my pain,
Some soft resentments that may leave no stain
On her loved name, and then I will complain."

NEXT day, after dinner, Lord Verney said to Cleve, as they two sat alone, "I saw you at Lady Dorminster's last night. I saw you—about it. It seems to me you go to too many places, with the House to attend to; you stay too long—one can look in, you know. Sometimes one meets a person; I had a good deal of interesting conversation last night, for instance, with the French Ambassador. No one takes a hint better; they are very good listeners, the French, and that is the way they pick up so much information and opinion, and things. I had a cup of tea, and we talked—about it—for half-an-hour, until I had got my ideas well before him. A very able man, a brilliant person, and seemed—he appeared to go with me—about it—and very well up upon our history—and things—and—and—looking at you, it struck me—you're looking a good deal cut up, about it—and—and as if you were doing too much. And I said, you know, you were to look about, and see if there was any young person you liked—that was suitable—and—that kind of thing; but you know you must not fatigue yourself, and I don't want to hurry you; only it is a step you ought to take with a view to strengthen your position—ultimately. And—and—I hear it is too late to consider about Ethel—that would have been very nice, it struck me; but that is now out of the question, I understand—in fact, it is certain, although the world don't know it yet; and therefore we must consider some other alliance; and I don't see any very violent hurry. We must look about—and—and—you'll want some money, Cleve, when you have made up your mind."

"You are always too good," said Cleve.

"I—I mean with your *wife*—about it;" and Lord Verney coughed a little. "There's never any harm in a little money; the more you get, the more you can do. I always was of that opinion. Knowledge is power, and money is power, though in different ways; that was always my idea. What I want to impress on your mind, however, at this moment, particularly, is, that there is nothing very pressing as to time; we can afford a little time. The Onslow motto, you know, *it* conveys it, and your mother was connected with the Onslows."

It would not be easy to describe how the words of his noble uncle relieved Cleve Verney. Every sentence seemed to lift a load from his burthen, or to cut asunder some knot in the cordage of his bonds. He had not felt so much at ease since his hated conversation with Lord Verney in the library.

Not very long after this, Cleve made the best speech by many degrees he had ever spoken, a really forcible reply upon a subject he had very carefully made up, of which, in fact, he was a master. His uncle was very much pleased, and gave his hearers to understand pretty distinctly from what fountain he had drawn his inspiration, and promised them better things still, now that he had got him fairly in harness, and had him into his library, and they put their heads together; and he thought his talking with him a little did him no harm, Cleve's voice was so good, he could make himself heard—you must be able to reach their ears or you can hardly hope to make an impression; and Lord Verney's physician insisted on his sparing his throat.

So Lord Verney was pleased. Cleve was Lord Verney's throat, and the throat emitted good speeches, and everyone knew where the head was.

Not that Cleve was deficient; but Cleve had very unusual advantages.

Tom Sedley and Cleve were on rather odd terms now. Cleve kept up externally their old intimacy when they met. But he did not seek him out in those moods which used to call for honest Tom Sedley, when they ran down the river together to Greenwich, when Cleve was lazy, and wanted to hear the news, and say what he liked, and escape from criticism of every kind, and enjoy himself indolently.

For Verney now there was a sense of constraint wherever Tom Sedley was. Even in Tom's manner there was a shyness. Tom had learned a secret which he had not confided to him. He knew he was safe in Tom Sedley's hands. Still he was in his power, and Sedley knew it, and that galled his pride, and made an estrangement.

In the early May, "When winds are sweet though they unruly be," Tom Sedley came down again to Cardyllian. Miss Charity welcomed him with her accustomed emphasis upon the green. How very pretty Agnes looked. But how cold her ways had grown.

He wished she was not so pretty—so *beautiful* in fact. It pained him, and somehow he had grown strange with her; and she was changed, grave and silent rather, and, as it seemed, careless quite whether he was there or not. Although he could never charge her with positive unkindness, much less with rudeness. He wished she would be rude. He would have liked to upbraid her. But her gentle, careless cruelty was a torture that justified no complaint, and admitted no redress.

He could talk volubly and pleasantly enough for hours with Charity, not caring a farthing whether he pleased her or not, and thinking only whether Agnes, who sat silent at her work, liked his stories and was amused by his fun; and went away elated for a whole night and day because a joke of his had made her laugh. Never had Tom felt more proud and triumphant in all his days.

But when Charity left the room to see old Vane Etherage in the study, a strange silence fell upon Tom. You could hear each stitch of her tambourwork. You could hear Tom's breathing. He fancied she might hear the beating of his heart. He was ashamed of his silence. He could have been eloquent had he spoken from that loaded heart. But he dare not, and failing this he must be silent.

By this time Tom was always thinking of Agnes Etherage, and wondering at the perversity of fate. He was in love. He could not cheat himself into any evasion of that truth—a tyrant truth that had ruled him mercilessly; and there was she pining for love of quite another, and bestowing upon him, who disdained it, all the treasure of her heart, while even a look would have been cherished with gratitude by Sedley.

What was the good of his going up every day to Hazelden, Tom Sedley thought, to look at her, and talk to Charity, and laugh, and recount entertaining gossip, and make jokes, and be agreeable, with a heavy and strangely suffering heart, and feel himself every day more and more in love with her, when he knew that the sound of Cleve's footstep, as he walked by, thinking of himself, would move her heart more than all Tom Sedley, adoring her, could say in his lifetime?

What a fool he was! Before Cleve appeared she was fancy-free, no one else in the field, and his opportunities unlimited. He had lapsed his time, and occasion had spread its wings and flown.

"What beautiful sunshine! What do you say to a walk on the green?" said Tom to Charity, and listening for a word from Agnes. She raised her pretty eyes, and looked out, but said nothing.

"Yes. I think it would be very nice; and there is no wind. What do *you* say, Agnes?"

"I don't know. I'm lazy to-day, I think, and I have this to finish," said Agnes.

"But you ought to take a walk, Agnes; it would do you good, and Thomas Sedley and I are going for a walk on the green."

"Pray do," pleaded Tom timidly.

Agnes smiled and shook her head, looking out of the window, and, making no other answer resumed her, work.

"You are *very* obstinate," remarked Charity.

"Yes, and lazy, like the donkeys on the green, where you are going;

but you don't want me particularly —I mean *you*, Charrie—and Mr. Sedley, I know, will excuse me, for I really feel that it would tire me to-day. It would tire me to death," said Agnes, winding up with an emphasis.

"Well, *I*'ll go and put on my things, and if you *like* to come you *can* come, and if you don't you can stay where you are. But I wish you would not be a fool. It is a beautiful day, and nothing on earth to prevent you."

"I don't like the idea of a walk to-day. I know I should feel tired immediately, and have to bring you back again, and I've really grown interested in this little bit of work, and I feel as if I must finish it to-day."

"You *are* such a goose, Agnes," said Charity, marching out of the room.

Tom remained there standing, his hat in his hands, looking out of the window—longing to speak, his heart being full, yet not knowing how to begin, or how to go on if he had begun.

Agnes worked on diligently, and looked out from the window at her side over the shorn grass and flower-beds, through the old trees in the foreground — over the tops of the sloping forest, with the back-ground of the grand Welsh mountains, and a glimpse of the estuary, here and there, seen through the leaves, stretching in dim gold and gray.

"You like that particular window," said Tom, making a wonderful effort; "I mean, why do you like always to sit there?" He spoke in as careless a way as he could, looking still out of his window, which commanded a different view.

"This window! oh, my frame stands here always, and when one is accustomed to a particular place, it puts one out to change."

Then Agnes dropped her pretty eyes again to her worsted, and worked and hummed very faintly a little air, and Tom's heart swelled within him, and he hummed as faintly the same gay air.

"I thought perhaps you liked that view?" said Tom Sedley, arresting the music.

She looked out again—

"Well, it's very pretty."

"The best from these windows; some people think, I believe, the prettiest view you have," said Tom, gathering force, "the water is always so pretty."

"Yes, the water," she assented listlessly.

"Quite a romantic view," continued Sedley, a little bitterly.

"Yes, every pretty view is romantic," she acquiesced, looking out for a moment again. "If one knew exactly what *romantic* means — it's a word we use so often, and so vaguely."

"And can't you define it, Agnes?"

"Define it? I really don't think I could."

"Well, that does surprise me."

"You are so much more clever than I, of course it does."

"No, quite the contrary; you are clever—I'm serious, I assure you—and I'm a dull fellow, and I know it quite well—*I* can't define it; but *that* doesn't surprise me."

"Then we are both in the same case; but I won't allow it's stupidity—the idea is not quite definable, and that is the real difficulty. You can't describe the perfume of a violet, but you know it quite well, and I really think flowers a more interesting subject than romance."

"Oh, really! not, surely, than the romance of *that* view. It *is* so romantic!"

"You seem quite in love with it," said she, with a little laugh, and began again with a grave face to stitch in the glory of her saint in celestial yellow worsted.

"The water — yes — and the old trees of Ware, and just that tower, at the angle of the house."

Agnes just glanced through her window, but said nothing.

"I think," said Sedley, "if *I* were peopling this scene, you know, I should put my hero in that Castle of Ware—that is, if I could invent a romance, which, of course, I couldn't." He spoke with a meaning, I think.

"Why should there be heroes in romances?" asked Miss Agnes, looking nevertheless toward Ware, with her hand and the needle resting idly upon the frame. "Don't you think a romance ought to resemble reality a little; and do you ever find such a monster as a hero in the world? *I* don't expect to see one, I know,"

and she laughed again, but Tom thought, a little bitterly, and applied once more diligently to her work, and hummed a few bars of her little air again.

And Tom, standing now in the middle of the room, leaning on the back of a chair, by way of looking still upon the landscape which they had been discussing, was really looking, unobserved, on her, and thinking that there was not in all the world so pretty a creature.

Charity opened the door, equipped for the walk, and bearing an alpaca umbrella such as few gentlemen would like to walk with in Mayfair.

"Well, you won't come, I see. I think you are very obstinate. Come, Thomas Sedley. Good-bye, Agnes;" and with these words the worthy girl led forth my friend Tom, and as they passed the corner of the house, he saw Agnes standing in the window, looking out sadly, with her finger-tips against the pane.

"She's lonely, poor little thing!" thought he, with a pang. "Why wouldn't she come? Listlessness—apathy, I suppose. How selfish and odious any trifling with a girl's affections is;" and then aloud to Charity, walking by her side, he continued, "you have not seen Cleve since the great day of Lord Verney's visit, I suppose?"

"No, nothing of him, and don't desire to see him. He has been the cause of a great deal of suffering, as you see, and I think he has behaved *odiously*. She's very odd; she doesn't choose to confide in me. I don't think it's nice or kind of her, but, of course, it's her own affair; only this is plain to me, that she'll never think of any one else now but Cleve Verney."

"It's an awful pity," said Tom Sedley, quite sincerely.

They were walking down that steep and solitary road, by which Vane Etherage had made his memorable descent a few months since, now in deep shadow under the airy canopy of transparent leaves, and in total silence, except for the sounds, far below, of the little mill-stream struggling among the rocks.

"Don't you know Mr. Cleve Verney pretty well?"

"Intimately — that is, I *did*. I have not lately seen so much of him."

"And do you think, Thomas Sedley, that he will ever come forward?" said blunt Miss Charity.

"Well, I happen to know that Cleve Verney has no idea of anything of the kind. In fact, I should be deceiving you, if I did not say distinctly that I know he won't."

Tom was going to say he *can't*, but checked himself. However, I think he was not sorry to have an opportunity of testifying to this fact, and putting Cleve Verney quite out of the field of conjecture as a possible candidate.

"Then I must say," said Miss Charity, flushing brightly, "that Mr. Verney is a villain."

From this strong position Tom could not dislodge her, and finding that expostulation involved him in a risk of a similar classification, he abandoned Cleve to his fate.

Up and down the green they walked until Miss Flood espied and arrested Charity Etherage, and carried her off upon a visit of philanthropy in her pony-carriage; and so Tom Sedley transferred his charge to fussy, imperious Miss Flood; and he felt strangely incensed with her, and walked the green, disappointed and bereft. Was not Charity Agnes's sister? While he walked with her he could talk of Agnes. He was still in the halo of Hazelden, and near Agnes. But now he was adrift, in the dark. He sat down, looking toward the upland woods that indicated Hazelden, and sighed with a much more real pain than he had ever sighed toward Malory; and he thought evil of meddling Miss Flood, who had carried away his companion. After a time he walked away toward Malory, intending a visit to his friend old Rebecca Mervyn, and thinking all the way of Agnes Etherage.

CHAPTER LII.

MRS. MERVYN'S DREAM.

He found himself, in a little time, under the windows of the steward's house. Old Rebecca Mervyn was seated on the bench beside the door, plying her knitting needles; she raised her eyes on hearing his step.

"Ha, he's come!" she said, lowering her hands to her knees, and fixing her dark wild gaze upon him, "I ought to have known it—so strange a dream must have had a meaning."

"They sometimes have, ma'am, I believe; I hope you are pretty well, Mrs. Mervyn."

"No, sir, I am not well."

"Very sorry, very sorry, indeed, ma'am," said Tom Sedley, "I've often thought this must be a very damp, unhealthy place—too much crowded up with trees; they say nothing is more trying to health. You'd be much better, I'm sure, anywhere else."

"No where else; my next move shall be my last. I care not how soon, sir."

"Pray, don't give way to low spirits; you really mustn't," said Tom.

"Tell me what it is, sir; for I know you have come to tell me something."

"No, I assure you; merely to ask you how you are, and whether I can be of any use."

"Oh! sir; what use?—*no.*

"Do you wish me to give any message to that fellow Dingwell? Pray make use of me in any way that strikes you. I hear he is on the point of leaving England again."

"I'm glad of it," exclaimed the old lady. "Why do I say so? I'm glad of nothing; but I'm sure it is better. What business could he and Mr. Larkin, and that Jew, have with my child, who, thank God, is in heaven, and out of the reach of their hands, *evil* hands, I dare say."

"So I rather think, also, ma'am; and Mr. Larkin tried, did he?"

"Larkin;—yes, that was the name. He came here, sir, about the time I saw you; and he talked a great deal about my poor little child. It is dead, you know, but I did not tell him so. I promised Lady Verney I'd tell nothing to strangers—they all grow angry then. Mr. Larkin was angry, I think. But I do not speak—and you advised me to be silent—and though he said he was their lawyer, I would not answer a word."

"I have no doubt you acted wisely, Mrs. Mervyn, you cannot be too cautious in holding any communication with such people."

"I'd tell you, sir—if I dare; but I've promised, and I *daren't.* Till old Lady Verney's gone, I daren't. I know nothing of law-papers—my poor head! How should I? And she could not half understand them. So I promised. *You* would understand them. Time enough—time enough."

"I should be only too happy—whenever you please," said Tom.

"And, you, sir, have come to tell me something; what is it?"

"I assure you I have nothing particular to say; I merely called to inquire how you are."

"Nothing more needless, sir; how can a poor lonely old woman be, whose last hope has gone out and left her alone in the wilderness? For twenty years—more, *more* than twenty—I have been watching, day and night; and now, sir, I look at the sea no more. I will never see those head-lands again. I sit here, sir, from day to day, thinking; and, oh, dear, I wish it was all over."

"Any time you should want me, I should be only too happy, and this is my address."

"And you have nothing to tell me?"

"No, ma'am nothing more than I said."

"It was wonderful: I dreamed last night I was looking toward Pendillon, watching as I used; the moon was above the mountain, and I was standing by the water, so that the sea came up to my feet, and I saw a speck of white far away, and something told me it was his sail at last, and nearer and nearer, very fast it came; and I walked out to meet it, in the shallow water, with my arms stretched to meet it, and when it came very near I saw it was Arthur himself coming upright in his shroud, his feet on the water, and with his

feet, hands, and face as white as snow, and his arms stretched to meet mine; and I felt I was going to die; and I covered my eyes with my hands, praying to God to receive me, expecting his touch; and I heard the rush of the water about his feet, and a voice—it was yours, not his—said, 'Look at me,' and I did look, and saw you, and you looked like a man that had been drowned—your face as white as his, and your clothes dripping, and sand in your hair; and I stepped back, saying, 'My God! how have you come here?' and you said, 'Listen, I have great news to tell you;' and I waked with a shock. I don't believe in dreams more I believe than other people, but this troubles me still."

"Well, thank God, I have had no accident by land or by water," said Tom Sedley, smiling in spite of himself at the awful figure he cut in the old lady's vision; "and I have no news to tell, and I think it will puzzle those Jews and lawyers to draw me into their business whatever it is. I don't like that sort of people; you need never be afraid of me, ma'am, I detest them."

"Afraid of *you*, sir!—Oh no. You have been very kind. See, this view here is under the branches; you can't see the water from this, only those dark paths in the wood; and I walk round sometimes through that hollow and on by the low road toward Cardyllian in the evening, when no one is stirring, just to the ash tree, from which you can see the old church and the churchyard; and oh! sir, I wish I were lying there."

"You must not be talking in that melancholy way, ma'am," said Tom, kindly; "I'll come and see you again if you allow me; I think you are a great deal too lonely here; you ought to go out in a boat, ma'am, and take a drive now and then, and just rattle about a little, and you can't think how much good it would do you; and—I must go—and I hope I shall find you a great deal better when I come back"—and with these words he took his leave, and as he walked along that low narrow road that leads by the inland track to Cardyllian, of which old Rebecca Mervyn spoke, whom should he encounter but Miss Charity coming down the hill at a brisk pace with Miss Flood, in that lady's pony carriage. Smiling, hat in hand, he got himself well against the wall to let them pass; but the ladies drew up, and Miss Charity had a message to send home if he, Thomas Sedley, would be so good as to call at Jones's they would find a messenger, merely to tell Agnes that she was going to dine with Miss Flood, and would not be home till seven o'clock.

So Tom Sedley undertook it; smiled and bowed his adieus, and then walked faster toward the town, and instead of walking direct to Mrs. Jones, sauntered for a while on the green, and bethought him what mistakes such messengers as Mrs. Jones could provide, sometimes make, and so resolved himself to be Miss Charity's Mercury.

Sedly felt happier, with an odd kind of excited and unmeaning happiness, as he walked up the embowed steep toward Hazelden, than he had felt an hour or two before while walking down it. When he reached the little flowery platform of closely mown grass, on which stands the pretty house of Hazelden, he closed the iron gate gently, and looked toward the drawing-room windows that reach the grass, and felt a foolish flutter at his heart as he saw that the frame stood in Agnes's window without its mistress.

"Reading, now, I suppose," whispered Tom, as if he feared to disturb her. "She has changed her place, and she is reading;" and he began to speculate whether she sat on the ottoman or on the sofa, or in the cushioned arm-chair, with her novel in her hands. But his sidelong glances could not penetrate the panes, which returned only reflections of the sky or black shadow, excepting of the one object, the deserted frame which stood close to their surface.

There was a time, not long ago either, when Tom Sedley would have run across the grass to the drawing-room windows, and had he seen Agnes within would have made a semi-burglarious entry through one of them. But there had come of late, on a sudden, a sort of formality in his relations with Agnes; and so he walked round by the hall-door, and found the drawing-rooms empty, and touching the bell, learned that Miss Agnes had gone out for a walk.

"I've a message to give her from Miss Charity; have you any idea which way she went?"

He found himself making excuse to the servant for his inquiry. A short time since he would have asked quite frankly where she was, without dreaming of a reason; but now had grown, as I say, a reserve, which has always the more harmless incidents of guilt. He was apprehensive of suspicion; he was shy even of this old servant, and was encountering this inquiry by an explanation of his motives.

"I saw her go by the beech walk, sir," said the man.

"Oh! thanks; very good."

And he crossed the grass, and entered the beech walk, which is broad and straight, with towering files of beech at each side, and a thick screen of underwood and evergreens, and turning the screen of rhodendrons at the entrance of the walk, he found himself quite close to Agnes, who was walking toward him.

She stopped. He fancied she changed colour; had she mistaken him for some one else?

"Well, Agnes, I see the sun and the flowers prevailed, though we couldn't; and I'm glad, at all events, that you have had a little walk."

"Oh! yes, after all, I really couldn't resist; and is Charity coming?"

"No, you are not to expect her till tea time. She's gone with Miss Flood somewhere, and she sent me to tell you."

"Oh! thanks;" and Agnes hesitated, looking towards home, as if she intended returning.

"You may as well walk once more up and down; it does look so jolly; doesn't it?" said Tom; "pray do, Agnes."

"Well, yes, once more, I will; but that is all, for I really am a little tired."

They set out in silence, and Tom, with a great effort, said—

"I wonder, Agnes, you seem so cold, I mean so unfriendly with me, I think you do; and you must be quite aware of it; you must, *indeed*, Agnes. I *think* if you knew half the pain you are giving me—I really do—that you wouldn't."

The speech was very inartificial, but it had the merit of going direct to the point, and Miss Agnes began—

"I haven't been at all unfriendly."

"Oh! but you *have*—*indeed* you have—you are quite *changed*. And I don't know what I have done—I wish you'd tell me—to deserve it; because—even if there was—another—anything—no matter what—I'm an old friend, and I think it's very unkind; *you* don't perceive it, perhaps, but you are awfully changed."

Agnes laughed a very little, and she answered, looking down on the walk before her, as Sedley thought, with a very pretty blush, and I believe there was—

"It is a very serious accusation, and I don't deserve it. No, indeed, and even if it were true, it rather surprises me that it should in the least interest you; because we down here have seen so little of you that we might very reasonably suspect that you had begun to forget us."

"Well, I *have* been an *awful* fool, it is quite true, and you have punished me, not more than I deserve; but I think you might have remembered that you had not on earth a better friend—I mean a more earnest one—particularly *you*, Agnes, than I."

"I really don't know what I have done," pleaded she, with another little laugh.

"I was here, you know, as intimate almost as a brother. I don't say, of course, there are not many things that I had no right to expect to hear anything about; but if I had, and been thought worthy of confidence, I would at all events have spoken honestly. But—may I speak quite frankly, Agnes?—You won't be offended, will you?"

"No; I shan't—I'm quite sure."

"Well, it was only this—you *are* changed, Agnes, you know you are. Just this moment, for instance, you were going home, only because *I* came here, and you fancied I might join you in your walk; and this change began when Cleve Verney was down here staying at Ware, and used to walk with you on the green."

Agnes stopped short at these words, and drew back a step, looking at Sedley with an angry surprise.

"I don't understand you—I'm certain I don't. I can't conceive what you mean;" she said.

Sedley paused in equal surprise.

"I—I beg pardon; I'm awfully sorry—you'll never know *how* sorry—if I

have said anything to vex you; but I *did* think it was some influence, or something connected with that time."

"I really don't pretend to understand you," said Agnes, coldly, with eyes, however, that gleamed resentfully. "I do recollect perfectly Mr. Cleve Verney's walking half-a-dozen times with Charity and me upon the green, but what that can possibly have to do with your fancied wrongs, I cannot imagine; I fancied you were a friend of Mr. Verney's."

"So I was—so I am; but no such friend as I am of yours—*your* friend, Agnes. There's no use in saying it; but, Agnes, I'd die for you—I would indeed."

"I'm not likely to ask you, Mr. Sedley; but I thought it very strange, your coming so very seldom to inquire for papa, when he was so poorly last year, when you were at Cardyllian. *He* did not seem to mind it; but, considering as you say how much you once used to be here, it did strike me as very *rude*—I may as well say what I really thought—not only unkind but rude. So that if there has been any change, you need not look to other people for the cause of it."

"If you knew how I blame myself for that, I think, bad as it was, you'd forgive me."

"I think it showed that you did not very much care what became of us."

"Oh! Agnes, you did not think that—you never thought it. Unless *you* are happy, I *can't* be happy, nor even then unless I think you have forgiven me; and I think if I could be sure you liked me ever so little, even in the old way, I should be one of the happiest people in the world. I don't make any excuses—I was the stupidest fool on earth—I only throw myself on your mercy, and ask you to forgive me."

"I've nothing to forgive," said Agnes, with a cruel little laugh.

"Well, well—*forget*—oh, *do!* and shake hands like your old self. You have no idea how miserable I have been."

With a very beautiful blush and a smile—a little shy, and so gratified—and a little silvery laugh, Agnes relented, and did give her hand to Tom Sedley.

"Oh, Agnes! Oh, Agnes! I'm so happy and so grateful! Oh, Agnes, you won't take it away—just for a moment."

She plucked her hand to remove it, for Tom was exceeding his privilege, and kissing it.

"*Now* we are friends," said Agnes, laughing.

"Are we *quite* friends?"

"Yes, quite."

"You must not take your hand away—one moment more. Oh, Agnes, I can never tell you—never how I love you. You are my darling, Agnes, and I can't live without you."

"Agnes said something—was it reproof or repulse? He only knew that the tones were sad and gentle, and that she was drawing her hand away.

"Oh, darling, I adore you! You would not make me miserable for life. There is nothing I won't do—nothing I won't try—if you'll only say you like me—ever so little. Do sit down here, just for a moment"—there was a rustic seat beside them—"only for a moment."

She did sit down, and he beside her. That "moment" of Tom Sedley's grew as such moments will, like the bean that Jack sowed in his garden, till it reached Titania knows whither. I know that Miss Charity on her return surprised it still growing.

"I made the tea, Agnes, fancying you were in your room. I've had such a search for you. I really think you might have told Edward where you were going. Will you drink tea with us, Thomas Sedley, this evening? though I am afraid you'll find it perfectly cold."

If Miss Charity had been either suspicious or romantic she would have seen by a glance at the young people's faces what had happened; but being neither, and quite pre-occupied with her theory about Cleve Verney, and having never dreamed of Tom Sedley as possibly making his *debut* at Hazelden in the character of a lover—she brought her prisoners home, with only a vague sense now and then that there was either something a little odd in their manner or in her own perceptions, and she remarked, looking a little curiously at Tom, in reference to some query of hers—

"I've asked you that question twice without an answer, and now you say something totally unmeaning!"

CHAPTER LIII.

"WILL *you* tell her?" whispered Sedley to Agnes.

"Oh, no. Do *you*," she entreated.

They both looked at Charity, who was preparing the little dog's supper of bread and milk in a saucer.

"I'll go in, and see papa, and you shall speak to her," said Agnes.

Which Tom Sedley did, so much to her amazement that she set the saucer down on the table beside her, and listened, and conversed for half an hour, and the poodle's screams, and wild jumping and clawing at her elbow, at last reminded her that he had been quite forgotten.

So while its mistress was apologizing earnestly to poor Bijou, and superintending his attentions to the bread and milk, now placed upon the floor, in came Agnes, and up got Charity, and kissed her with a frank beaming smile, and said—

"I'm *excessively* glad, Agnes. I was always *so* fond of Thomas Sedley; and I *wonder* we never thought of it before.

They were all holding hands in a ring by this time.

"And what do you think Mr. Etherage will say?" inquired Tom.

"Papa! why of *course* he will be *delighted*," said Miss Charity. "He likes you *extremely*."

"But you know, Agnes might do so much better. She's such a treasure, there's no one that would not be proud of her, and no one could help falling in love with her, and the Ad——I mean Mr. Etherage, may think me so presumptuous, and, you know, he may think me quite too poor."

"If you mean to say that papa would object to you because you have only four hundred a year, you think most meanly of him. I know *I* should not like to be connected with anybody that I thought so meanly of, because that kind of thing I look upon as really *wicked;* and I should be sorry to think papa was wicked. I'll go in and tell him all that has happened this moment."

In an awful suspense, pretty Agnes and Tom Sedley, with her hand in both his, stood side by side, looking earnestly at the double door which separated them from this conference.

In a few minutes they heard Vane Etherage's voice raised to a pitch of testy bluster, and then Miss Charity's rejoinder with shrill emphasis.

"Oh! gracious goodness! he's very angry. What shall we do?" exclaimed poor little Agnes, in wild helplessness.

"I *knew* it—I *knew* it—I *said* how it would be—he can't endure the idea, he thinks it such audacity. I knew he must, and I really think I shall lose my reason. I could not—I *could* not live. Oh! Agnes, I *could*n't if he prevents it."

In came Miss Charity, very red and angry.

"He's just in one of his odd tempers. I don't mind one *word* he says to-night. He'll be quite different, you'll *see*, in the morning. We'll sit up here, and have a good talk about it, till it's time for you to go; and you'll see I'm quite right. I'm *surprised*," she continued, with severity, "at his talking as he did to-night. I consider it quite worldly and *wicked!* But I contented myself with telling him that he did not think one word of what he said, and that he *knew* he didn't, and that he'd tell me so in the morning; and instead of feeling it, as I thought he would, he said something intolerably rude."

Old Etherage, about an hour later, when they were all in animated debate, shuffled to the door, and put in his head, and looked surprised to see Tom, who looked alarmed to see him. And the old gentleman bid them all a glowering good-night, and shortly after they heard him wheeled away to his bed-room, and were relieved.

They sat up awfully late, and the old servant who poked into the room oftener than he was wanted towards the close of their sitting, looked wan and bewildered with drowsiness; and at last Charity, struck by the ghastly resignation of his countenance, glanced at the French clock over the chimney-piece, and ejaculated,—

"Why, merciful goodness! is it possible? A quarter to one! It *can't possibly be.* Thomas Sedley *will* you look at your watch, and tell us what o'clock it really is?"

His watch corroborated the French clock.

"*If* papa heard this! I really

can't the least *conceive* how it happened. I did not think it could have been *eleven.* Well, it is *undoubtedly* the *oddest* thing that *ever* happened in this house!"

In the morning between ten and eleven, when Tom Sedley appeared again at the drawing-room windows, he learned from Charity, in her own emphatic style of narration, what had since taken place, which was not a great deal, but still was uncomfortably ambiguous.

She had visited her father at his breakfast in the study, and promptly introduced the subject of Tom Sedley, and he broke into this line of observation,—

"I'd like to know what the deuce Tom Sedley means by talking of business to girls. I'd like to know it. I say, if he has anything to say, why doesn't he *say* it, that's what *I* say. Here I *am.* What has he to *say.* I don't object to hear him, be it sense or be it nonsense—out with it! That's my maxim; and be it sense or be it nonsense, I won't have it at second-*hand.* That's *my* idea."

Acting upon this, Miss Charity insisted that he ought to see Mr. Etherage; and with a beating heart, he knocked at the study door, and asked an audience.

"Come in," exclaimed the resonant voice of the Admiral. And Tom Sedley obeyed.

The Admiral extended his hand, and greeted Tom kindly, but gravely.

"Fine day, Mr. Sedley; very fine, sir. It's an odd thing, Tom Sedley, but there's more really fine weather up here, at Hazelden, than anywhere else in Wales. More sunshine, and a *deal* less rain. You'd hardly believe, for you'd fancy on this elevated ground we should naturally have *more* rain, but it's *less,* by several inches, than anywhere else in Wales! And there's next to no damp—the hygrometer tells *that.* And a curious thing, you'll have a southerly wind up here when it's blowing from the east on the estuary. You can see it, by Jove! Now just look out of that window; did you ever see such sunshine as that? There's a clearness in the air up here—at the *other* side, if you go up, you get *mist*—but there's something about it here that I would not change for any place in the world."

You may be sure Tom did not dispute any of these points.

"By Jove, Tom Sedley, it would be a glorious day for a sail round the point of Penruthyn. I'd have been down with the tide, sir, this morning if I had been as I was ten years ago; but a fellow doesn't like to be lifted into his yacht, and the girls did not care for sailing; so I sold her. There wasn't such a boat—take her for everything—in the *world—never!*"

"The *Feather;* wasn't she, sir?" said Tom.

"The *Feather!* that she was, sir. A name pretty well known, I venture to think. Yes, the *Feather* was her name."

"I *have,* sir; yes, indeed, often heard her spoken of," said Tom, who had heard one or two of the boatmen of Cardyllian mention her with a guarded sort of commendation. I never could learn, indeed, that there was anything very remarkable about the boat; but Tom would just then have backed any assertion of the honest Admiral's with a loyal alacrity, bordering, I am afraid, upon unscrupulousness.

"There are the girls going out with their trowels, going to poke among those flowers; and certainly, I'll do them the justice to say, their garden prospers. I don't see such flowers *any*where; do you?"

"*Nowhere!*" said Tom, with enthusiasm.

"Ay, there they're at it—grubbing and raking. And by-the-bye, Tom, what was that? Sit down for a minute."

Tom felt as if he was going to choke, but he sat down.

"What was that—some nonsense Charity was telling me last night?"

Thus invited, poor Sedley, with many hesitations, and wanderings, and falterings, did get through his romantic story. And Mr. Etherage did not look pleased by the recital. on the contrary, he carried his head unusually high, and looked hot and minatory, but he did not explode. He continued looking on the opposite wall, as he had done as if he were eyeing a battle there, and he cleared his voice.

"As I understand it, sir, there's not an income to make it at all prudent. I don't want my girls to marry; I should, in fact, miss them very much;

but if they do, there ought to be a settlement, don't you see? there should be a settlement, for *I* can't do so much for them as people suppose. The property is settled, and the greater part goes to my grand-nephew after me; and I've invested, as you know, all my stock and money in the quarry at Llanrwyd; and if she married you, she should live in London the greater part of the year. And I don't see how you could get on upon what you both have; I don't, sir. And I must say, I think you ought to have spoken to me before paying your addresses, sir. I don't think that's unreasonable; on the contrary, I think it *reasonable, perfectly* so, and only right and fair. And I must go further, sir; I must say this, I don't see, sir, without a proper competence, what pretensions you had to address my child."

"None, sir; none in the world, Mr. Etherage. I know, sir, I've been thinking of my presumption ever since. I betrayed myself into it, sir; it was a kind of surprise. If I had reflected I should have come to you, sir; but—but you have no idea, sir, how I adore her." Tom's eye wandered after her through the window, among the flowers. "Or what it would be to me to—to have to"——

Tom Sedley faltered, and bit his lip, and started up quickly and looked at an engraving of old Etherage's frigate, which hung on the study wall.

He looked at it for some time steadfastly. Never was man so affected by the portrait of a frigate, you would have thought. Vane Etherage saw him dry his eyes stealthily two or three times, and the old gentleman coughed a little, and looked out of the window, and would have got up, if he could, and stood close to it.

"It's a beautiful day, certainly; wind coming round a bit to the south, though—south by east; that's always a squally wind with us; and—and—I assure you I like you, Tom; upon my honour I do, Tom Sedley—better, sir, than any young fellow I know. I think I *do*—I am *sure*, in fact, I do. But this thing—it wouldn't do—it really wouldn't; no, Tom Sedley, it wouldn't *do;* if you reflect you'll see it. But, of course, you may get on in the world. Rome wasn't built in a day."

"It's very kind of you, sir; but the time's so long, and so many chances," said Sedley, with a sigh like a sob; "and when I go away, sir, the sooner I die, the happier for me."

Tom turned again quickly toward the frigate—the *Vulcan*—and old Etherage looked out of the window once more, and up at the clouds.

"Yes," said the Admiral, "it will; we shall have it from south by east. And, d'ye hear, Tom Sedley? I—I've been thinking there's no need to make any fuss about this—this thing; just let it be as if you had never said a word about it, do you mind, and come here just as usual. Let us put it out of our heads; and if you find matters improve, and still wish it, there's nothing to prevent your speaking to me; only Agnes is perfectly free, you understand, and you are not to make any change in your demeanour—ha—a—or—I mean to be more with my daughters, or anything *marked*, you understand. People begin to talk here, you know, in the club-house, on very slight grounds; and—and—you understand now; and there mustn't be any nonsense; and I like you, sir—I like you, Thomas Sedley; I do—I do, indeed, sir."

And old Vane Etherage gave him a very friendly shake by the hand, and Tom thanked him gratefully, and went away reprieved, and took a walk with the girls, and told them, as they expressed it, *everything;* and Vane Etherage thought it incumbent on him to soften matters a little by asking him to dinner; and Tom accepted; and when they broke up after tea, there was another mistake discovered about the hour, and Miss Charity most emphatically announced that it was *perfectly unaccountable*, and must *never* occur again; and I hope, for the sake of the venerable man who sat up, resigned and affronted, to secure the hall-door and put out the lamps after the party had broken up, that these irregular hours were kept no more at Hazelden.

CHAPTER LIV.

ARCADIAN LILAC, AND LABURNUM AND RED BRICK.

As time proceeds, renewal and decay, its twin principles of mutation, being everywhere, and necessarily active, apply to the moral as well as to the material world. Affections displace and succeed one another. The most beautiful are often the first to die. Characteristics in their beginning, minute and unsubstantial as the fairy brood that people the woodland air, enlarge and materialize till they usurp the dominion of the whole man, and the people and the world are changed.

Sir Booth Fanshawe is away at Paris just now, engaged in a great negociation, which is to bring order out of chaos, and inform him at last what he is really worth *per annum.* Margaret and her cousin, Miss Sheckleton have revisited England; their Norman retreat is untenanted for the present.

With the sorrow of a great concealment upon her, with other sorrows that she does not tell, Margaret looks sad and pale.

In a small old suburban house, that stands alone, with a rural affectation, on a little patch of shorn grass, embowered in lilacs and laburnums, and built of a deep vermilion brick, the residence of these ladies is established.

It is a summer evening, and a beautiful little boy, more than a year old, is sprawling, and rolling, and babbling, and laughing on the grass upon his back. Margaret is seated on the grass beside him, prattles and laughs with him, and rolls him about, delighted, and adoring her little idol.

Old Anne Sheckleton, sitting on the bench, smiling happily, under the window, which is clustered round with roses, contributes her quota of nonsense to the prattle.

In the midst of this comes a ring at the bell in the jessamine-covered wall, and a tidy little maid runs out to the green door, opens it, and in steps Cleve Verney.

Margaret is on her feet in a moment, with the light of a different love, something of the old romance, in the glad surprise, "Oh, darling, it is you!" and her arms are about his neck, and he stoops and kisses her fondly, and in his face for a moment is reflected the glory of that delighted smile.

"Yes, darling. Are you better?"

"Oh, yes—ever so much; I'm always well when you are here; and look, see our poor little darling."

"So he is."

"We have had such fun with him—haven't we, Anne? I'm sure he'll be so like you."

Is that in his favour, Cousin Anne?" asked Cleve, taking the old lady's hand.

"Why should it not?" said she, gaily.

"A question—well, I take the benefit of the doubt," laughed Cleve. "No, darling," he said to Margaret, "you mustn't sit on the grass; it is damp; you'll sit beside our Cousin Anne, and be prudent."

So he instead sat down on the grass, and talked with them, and prattled and romped with the baby by turns, until the nurse came out to convey him to the nursery, and he was handed round to say what passes for "Good night," and give his tiny paw to each in turn.

"You look tired, Cleve, darling."

"So I am, my Guido; can we have a cup of tea?"

"Oh, yes. I'll get it in a moment," said active Anne Sheckleton.

"It's too bad disturbing you," said Cleve.

"No trouble in the world," said Anne, who wished to allow them a word together; besides, I must kiss baby in his bed."

"Yes, darling, I *am* tired," said Cleve, taking his place beside her, so soon as old Anne Sheckleton was gone. "That old man"——

"Lord Verney, do you mean?"

"Yes; he has begun plaguing me again."

"What is it about, darling?"

"Oh, fifty things; he thinks among others I ought to marry," said Cleve, with a dreary laugh.

"Oh! I thought he had given up that," she said, with a smile that was very pale.

"So he did for a time; but I think he's possessed. If he happens to

take up an idea that's likely to annoy other people he never lets it drop till he teases them half to death. He thinks I should gain *money* and political connexion, and I don't know what all, and I'm quite tired of the whole thing. What a vulgar little box this is—isn't it, darling? I almost wish you were back again in that place in France."

"But I can see you so much oftener here, Cleve," pleaded Margaret, softly, with a very sad look.

"And where's the good of seeing me here, dear Margaret? Just consider, I always come to you anxious; there's always a risk, besides, of discovery."

"Where you are is to me a paradise."

"Oh, darling, do *not* talk rubbish. This vulgar, odious little place! No place can be *either—quite*, of course, where *you* are. But you must see what it is—a paradise"—and he laughed peevishly—"of red brick, and lilacs, and laburnums—a paradise for old Mr. Dowlas, the tallow-chandler."

There was a little tremor in Margaret's lip, and the water stood in her large eyes; her hand was, as it were, on the coffin-edge; she was looking down in the face of a dead romance.

"Now, you really must not shed tears over *that* speech. You are too much given to weeping, Margaret. What have I said to vex you? It merely amounts to this, that we live just now in the future; we can't well deny *that*, darling. But the time will come at last, and my queen enjoy her own."

And so saying he kissed her, and told her to be a good little girl; and from the window Miss Sheckleton handed them tea, and then she ran up to the nursery.

"You *do* look very tired, Cleve," said Margaret, looking into his anxious face.

"I *am* tired, darling," he said, with just a degree of impatience in his tone; "I said so—horribly tired."

"I wish so much you were out of the House of Commons."

"Now, my wise little woman is talking of what she doesn't understand—not the least; besides, what would you have me turn to? I should be totally without resource and pursuit—don't you see? We must be reasonable. No, it is not that in the least that tires me, but I'm really overwhelmed with anxieties, and worried by my uncle, who wants me to marry, and thinks I can marry very well, and whom I like—that's all."

"I sometimes think, Cleve, I've spoiled your fortunes," with a great sigh said Margaret.

"Now, where's the good of saying that, my little woman? I'm only talking of my uncle's teazing me, and wishing he'd let us both alone."

Here came a little pause.

"Is that the baby?" said Margaret, raising her head and listening.

"I don't hear our baby or anyone else's," said Cleve.

"I fancied I heard it cry, but it wasn't."

"You must think of me more, and of that child less, darling—you must, indeed," said Cleve, a little sourly.

I think the poor heart was pleased, thinking this jealousy; but I fear it was rather a splenetic impulse of selfishness, and that the baby was, in his eyes, a bore pretty often.

"Does the House sit to-night, Cleve, darling?"

"Does it, indeed? Why it's sitting now. We are to have the second reading of the West India Bill on to-night, and I must be there—yes—in an hour"—he was glancing at his watch—"and heaven knows at what hour in the morning we shall get away."

And just at this moment old Anne Sheckleton joined them. "She's coming with more tea," she said, as the maid emerged with a little tray, "and we'll place our cups on the window-stone when we don't want them. Now, Mr. Verney, is not this a charming little spot just at this light?"

"I almost think it is," said Cleve, relenting. The golden light of evening was touching the formal poplars, and the other trees, and bringing out the wrinkles of the old bricks duskily in its flaming glow.

"Yes, just for about fifteen minutes in the twenty-four hours, when the weather is particularly favourable, it *has* a sort of Dutch picturesqueness; but on the whole, it is not the sort of cottage that I would choose for a permanent dove-cot. I should fear lest my pigeons should choke with dust."

"No, there's no dust here; it is

the quietest, most sylvan little lane in the world."

"Which is a wide place," said Cleve. "Well, with smoke then."

"Nor smoke either."

"But I forgot, love does not die of smoke, or of anything else," said Cleve.

"No, of course, love is eternal," said Margaret.

"Just so; the King never dies. Les roix meurent-ils? Quelquefoi, madame. Alas, theory and fact conflict. Love is eternal in the abstract; but nothing is more mortal than a particular love," said Cleve.

"If you think so, I wonder you ever wished to marry," said Margaret, and a faint tinge flushed her cheeks.

"I thought so, and yet I did wish to marry," said Cleve. "It is perishable, but I can't live without it," and he patted her cheek, and laughed a rather cold little laugh.

"No, love never dies," said Margaret, with a gleam of her old fierce spirit. "But perhaps it may be killed."

"It is terrible to kill anything," said Cleve.

"To kill love," she answered, "is the worst murder of all."

"A veritable murder," he acquiesced; "once killed, it never revives."

"You like talking awfully, as if I might lose your love," said she, haughtily; "as if, were I to vex you, you never could forgive."

"Forgiveness has nothing to do with it, my poor little woman. I no more called my love into being than I did myself; and should it die, either naturally or violently, I could no more recall it to life, than I could Cleopatra or Napoleon Bonaparte. It is a principle, don't you see? that comes as direct as life from heaven. We can't create it, we can't restore it; and really about love, it is worse than mortal, because, as I said, I am sure it has *no* resurrection—no, it has no resurrection."

"That seems to me a reason," she said, fixing her large eyes upon him with a wild resentment, "why you should cherish it *very* much while it lives."

"And *don't* I, darling?" he said, placing his arms round her neck, and drawing her fondly to his breast, and in the thrill of that momentary effusion was something of the old feeling when to lose her would have been despair, to gain her heaven, and it seemed as if the scent of the woods of Malory, and of the soft sea breeze, was around them for a moment.

And now he is gone, away to that weary House—lost to her, given up to his ambition, which seems more and more to absorb him; and she remains smiling on their beautiful little baby, with a great misgiving at her heart, for four and twenty hours more.

As Cleve went into the House, he met old Colonel Thongs, sometime whip of the "outs."

"You've heard about old Snowdon?"

"No."

"In the Cabinet, by Jove."

"Really?"

"Fact. Ask your uncle."

"By Jove, it *is* very unlooked for; no one thought of him; but I dare say he'll do very well."

"We'll soon try that."

It *was* a *very* odd appointment. But Lord Snowdon was gazetted; a dull man, but laborious; a man who had held minor offices at different periods of his life, and was presumed to have a competent knowledge of affairs. A dull man, owing all to his dulness, quite below many, and selected as a negative compromise for the vacant seat in the Cabinet, for which two zealous and brilliant competitors were contending.

"I see it all," thought Cleve; "that's the reason why Caroline Oldys and Lady Wimbledon are to be at Ware this autumn, and I'm to be married to the niece of a Cabinet minister."

Cleve sneered, but he felt very uneasy.

CHAPTER LV.

THE TRIUMVIRATE.

THAT night Lord Verney waited to hear the debate in the Commons—waited for the division,—and brought Cleve home with him in his brougham.

He explained to Cleve on the way how much better the debate might have been. He sometimes half regretted his seat in the Commons;

there were so many things unsaid that ought to have been said, and so many things said that had better have been omitted. And at last he remarked—

"Your uncle Arthur, my unfortunate brother, had a great natural talent for speaking. It's a talent of the Verney's—about it. We all have it; and *you* have got it also; it is a gift of very decided importance in debate; it can hardly be overestimated in that respect. Poor Arthur might have done very well, but he didn't, and he's gone—about it; and I'm very glad, for your own sake, you are cultivating it; and it would be a very great misfortune, I've been thinking, if our family were not to marry, and secure a transmission of those hereditary talents and—and things—and—what's your opinion of Miss Caroline Oldys? I mean, quite frankly, what sort of wife you think she would make."

"Why, to begin with, she's been out a long time; but I believe she's gentle—and foolish; and I believe her mother bullies her."

"I don't know what you call bullying, my good sir; but she appears to me to be a very affectionate mother; and as to her being foolish—about it—I can't perceive it; on the contrary, I've conversed with her a good deal—and things—and I've found her very superior indeed to any young woman I can recollect having talked to. She takes an interest in things which don't interest or—or—interest other young persons; and she likes to be instructed about affairs—and, my dear Cleve, I think where a young person of merit—either rightly or wrongly interpreting what she conceives to be your attentions—becomes decidedly *epris* of you, she ought to be—a—*considered*—her feelings, and things; and I thought I might as well mention my views, and go—about it—straight to the point; and I think you will perceive that it is reasonable, and that's the position—about it; and you know, Cleve, in these circumstances you may reckon upon me to do anything in reason that may still lie in my power—about it."

"You have always been too kind to me."

"You shall find me so still. Lady Wimbledon takes an interest in you, and Miss Caroline Oldys will, I undertake to say, more and more decidedly as she comes to know you better."

And so saying, Lord Verney leaned back in the brougham as if taking a doze, and after about five minutes of closed eyes and silence he suddenly wakened up and said—

"It is, in fact, it strikes me, high time, Cleve, you should marry—about it—and you must have money, too; you want money, and you shall have it."

"I'm afraid money is not one of *Caroline's* strong points."

"You need not trouble yourself upon that point, sir; if *I'm* satisfied I fancy *you* may. I've quite enough for both, I presume; and—and so, we'll let that matter rest."

And the noble lord let himself rest also, leaning stiffly back with closed eyes, and nodding and swaying silently with the motion of the carriage.

I believe he was only ruminating after his manner in these periods of apparent repose. He opened his eyes again, and remarked—

"I have talked over this affair carefully with Mr. Larkin—a most judicious and worthy person—about it, and you can talk to him, and so on, when he comes to town, and I should rather wish you to do so."

Lord Verney relapsed into silence and the semblance, at least, of slumber.

"So Larkin's at the bottom of it; I knew he was," thought Cleve, with a pang of hatred which augured ill for the future prospects of that good man. "He has made this alliance for the Oldys and Wimbledon faction, and I'm Mr. *Larkin's* parti, and am to settle the management of everything upon him; and what a judicious diplomatist he is—and how he has put his foot in it. A blundering hypocritical coxcomb—D—n him!"

Then his thoughts wandered away to Larkin, and to his instrument, Mr. Dingwell, "who looks as if he came from the galleys. We have heard nothing of him for a year or more. Among the Greek and Malay scoundrels again, I suppose; the Turks are too good for him."

But Mr. Dingwell had not taken his departure, and was not thinking of any such step *yet*, at least. He had business still on his hands, and a mission unaccomplished.

Still in the same queer lodgings, and more jealously shut up during the daytime than ever, Mr. Dingwell lived his odd life, professing to hate England—certainly in danger there—he yet lingered on for a set purpose, over which he brooded and laughed in his hermitage.

To so chatty a person as Mr. Dingwell solitude for a whole day was irksome. Sarah Rumble was his occasional resource, and when she brought him his cup of black coffee he would make her sit down by the wall, like a servant at prayers, and get from her all the news of the dingy little neighbourhood, with a running commentary of his own flighty and savage irony, and he would sometimes entertain her, between the whiffs of his long pipe, with talk of his own, which he was at no pains to adapt to her comprehension, and delivered rather for his own sole entertainment.

"The world, the flesh, and the devil, ma'am. The two first we know pretty well—hey? the other we take for granted. I suppose there *is* somebody of the sort. We are all pigs, ma'am—unclean animals—and this is a sty we live in—slime and abomination. Strong delusion is, unseen, circling in the air. Our ideas of beauty, delights of sense, varieties of intellect—all a most comical and frightful cheat—egad! What fun we must be, ma'am, to the spirits who *have* sight and intellect! I think, ma'am, we're meant for their pantomime—don't you? Our airs, and graces, and dignities, and compliments, and beauties, and dandies—our metal coronets, and lawn sleeves, and whalebone wigs—fun, ma'am, lots of fun! And here we are, a wonderful work of God. Eh? Come, ma'am—a word in your ear—all *putrefaction*—pah! nothing clean but fire, and that makes us roar and vanish—a very odd position we're placed in; hey, ma'am?"

Mr. Dingwell had at first led Sarah Rumble a frightful life, for she kept the door where the children were peremptorily locked, at which he took umbrage, and put her on fatigue duty, more than trebling her work by his caprices, and requiting her with his ironies and sneers, finding fault with everything, pretending to miss money out of his desk, and every day threatening to invoke Messrs. Levi and Goldshed, and invite an incursion of the police, and showing in his face, his tones—his jeers pointed and envenomed by revenge—that his hatred was active and fiendish.

But Sarah Rumble was resolute. He was not a desirable companion for childhood of either sex, and the battle went on for a considerable time; and poor Sarah in her misery besought Messrs. Levi and Goldshed, with many tears and prayers, that he might depart from her; and Levi looked at Goldshed, and Goldshed at Levi, quite gravely, and Levi winked, and Goldshed nodded, and said, "A bad boy;" and they spake comfortably, and told her they would support her, but Mr. Dingwell must remain her inmate, but they'd take care he should do her no harm.

Mr. Dingwell had a latch-key, which he at first used sparingly or timidly; with time, however, his courage grew, and he was out more or less every night. She used to hear him go out after the little household was in bed, and sometimes she heard him lock the hall-door, and his step on the stairs when the sky was already gray with the dawn.

And gradually finding company such as he affected out of doors, I suppose, he did not care so much for the seclusion of his fellow-lodgers, and ceased to resent it almost, and made it up with Sarah Rumble.

And one night, having to go up between one and two for a match-box to the lobby, she encountered Mr. Dingwell coming down. She was dumb with terror, for she did not know him, and took him for a burglar, he being somehow totally changed—she was too confused to recollect exactly, only that he had red hair and whiskers, and looked stouter.

She did not know him the least till he laughed. She was near fainting, and leaned with her shoulder to the corner of the wall; and he said:

"I've to put on these; you keep my secret, mind; you may lose me my life, else."

And he took her by the chin, and gave her a kiss, and then a slap on the cheek that seemed to her harder than play, for her ear tingled with it for an hour after, and she uttered a little cry of fright, and he laughed, and glided out of the hall-door, and

listened for the tread of a policeman, and peeped slily up and down the court; and then, with his cotton umbrella in his hand, walked quietly down the passage and disappeared.

Sarah Rumble feared him all the more for this little rencontre and the shock she had received, for there was a suggestion of something felonious in his disguise. She was, however, a saturnine and silent woman, with few acquaintances, and no fancy for collecting or communicating news. There was a spice of danger, too, in talking of this matter; so she took counsel of the son of Sirach, who says, "If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee, and, behold, it will not burst thee."

Sarah Rumble kept his secret, and henceforward at such hours kept close when in the deep silence of the night she heard the faint creak of his stealthy shoe upon the stair, and avoided him as she would a meeting with a ghost.

Whatever were his amusements, Messrs. Goldshed and Levi grumbled savagely at the cost of them. They grumbled because grumbling was a principle of theirs in carrying on their business.

"No matter how it turns out, keep always grumbling to the man who led you into the venture, especially if he has a claim to a share of the profits at the close."

So whenever Mr. Larkin saw Messrs. Goldshed and Levi he heard mourning and imprecation. The Hebrews shook their heads at the Christian, and chanted a Jeremiad, in duet, together, and each appealed to the other for confirmation of the dolorous and bitter truths he uttered. And the iron safe opened its jaws and disgorged the private ledger of the firm, which ponderous and greasy tome was laid on the desk with a pound, and opened at this transaction—the matter of Dingwell, Verney, &c.; and Mr. Levi would run his black nail along the awful items of expenditure that filled column after column.

"Look at that—look here—look, will you?—look, I say: you never sawed an account like that—never—all this here—look—down—and down—and down—and down—"

"Enough to frighten the Bank of England!" boomed Mr. Goldshed.

"Look down thish column," resumed Levi, "and thish, and thish, and thish—there's nine o' them—and not one stiver on th' other side. Look, look, look, look, *look!* Da-am, it'sh all a quaag, and a quick-shand — nothing but shink and shwallow, and give ush more"—and as he spoke Levi was knocking the knuckles of his long lean fingers fiercely upon the empty columns, and eyeing Larkin with a rueful ferocity, as if he had plundered and half-murdered him and his partner, who sat there innocent as the babes in the wood.

Mr. Larkin knew quite well, however, that so far from regretting their investment, they would not have sold their ventures under a very high figure indeed.

"And that da-am Dingwell, talking as if he had us all in quod, by ——, and always whimperin', and whingin', and swearin' for more—why you'd say, to listen to his bosh, 'twas *him* had *us* under his knuckle—you would—the lunatic!"

"And may I ask what he wants just at present?" inquired Mr. Larkin.

"What he always wants, and won't be easy never till he gets it—a walk up the mill, sir, and his head cropped, and six months' solitary, and a touch of corporal now and again. I never saw'd a cove as wanted a teazin' more; that's what he wants. What he's looking for, of course, is different, only he shan't get it, nohow. And I think, looking at that book there, as I showed you this account in—considering what me and the gov'nor here has done—'twould only be fair you should come down with summut, if you goes in for the lottery, with other gentlemen as pays their pool like bricks, and never does modest, by no chance."

"He has pushed that game a little too far," said Mr. Larkin; "I have considered his feelings a great deal too much."

"Yesh, but *we* have feelinsh. The *gov'nor* has feelinsh; I have *feelinsh.* Think what state our feelinsh is in, lookin' at that there account," said Mr. Levi, with much pathos.

Mr. Larkin glanced toward the door, and then toward the window.

"We are quite *alone?*" said he, mildly.

"Yesh, without you have the devil

in your pocket, as old Dingwell saysh," answered Levi, sulkily.

"For there are subjects of a painful nature, as you know, gentlemen, connected with this particular case," continued Mr. Larkin.

"Awful painful; but we'll sta-an' it," said Goldshed, with unctuous humour; "we'll sta-an it, but wishes it over quick;" and he winked at Levi.

"Yesh, he wishes it over quick," echoed Levi; "the gov'nor and me, we wishes it over quick."

"And so do I, *most* assuredly; but we must have a little patience. If deception does lurk here—and you know I warned you I suspected it—we must not prematurely trouble Lord Verney."

"He might throw up the sponge, he might, I *know*," said Levi, with a nod.

"I don't know what course Lord Verney might think it right in such a case to adopt; I only know that until I am in a position to reduce suspicion to certainty, it would hardly consist with right feeling to torture his mind upon the subject. In the meantime he is—a—growing"——

"Growing warm in his berth," said Goldshed.

"Establishing himself, I should say, in his position. He has been incurring, I need hardly tell you, enormous expense in restoring (I might say *re-building*) the princely mansions of Ware, and of Verney House. He applied much ready money to that object, and has charged the estates with nearly sixty thousand pounds besides." Mr. Larkin lowered his tones reverentially at the mention of so considerable a sum.

"I know Sirachs did nigh thirty thoushand o' that," said Mr. Goldshed.

"And that tends to—to—as I may say, *steady* him in his position; and I may mention, in confidence, gentlemen, that there are other measures on the *tapis* (he pronounced taypis) which will further and still more decidedly fix him in his position. It would pain us all deeply, gentlemen, that a premature disclosure of my uneasiness should inspire his lordship with a panic in which he might deal ruinously with his own interests, and, in fact, as you say, Mr. Levi, throw up the—the"——

"Sponge," said Levi, reflectively.

"But I may add," said Mr. Larkin, "that I am impatiently watching the moment when it may become my duty to open my suspicions fully to Lord Verney; and that I have reason to know that that moment cannot now be distant."

"Here's Tomlinshon comin' up, gov'nor," said Mr. Levi, jumping off the table on which he had been sitting, and sweeping the great ledger into his arms, he pitched it into its berth in the safe, and locked it into that awful prison-house.

"I said he would," said Goldshed, with a lazy smile, as he unlocked a drawer in the lumbering office table at which he sat. "Don't bring out them overdue renewals; we'll not want them till next week."

Mr. Tomlinson, a tall, thin man, in light drab trousers, with a cotton umbrella swinging in his hand, and a long careworn face, came striding up the court.

"You won't do *that* for him?" asked Levi.

"No, not to-day," murmured Mr. Goldshed, with a wink. And Mr. Tomlinson's timid knock and feeble ring at the door were heard.

And Mr. Larkin put on his well-brushed hat, and pulled on his big lavender gloves, and stood up at his full length, in his new black frock-coat, and waistcoat and trowsers of the accustomed hue, and presents the usual glossy and lavender-tinted effect, and a bland simper rests on his lank cheeks, and his small pink eyes look their adieux upon Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, on whom his airs and graces are quite lost; and with his slim silk umbrella between his great finger and thumb, he passes loftily by the cotton umbrella of Mr. Tomlinson, and fancies, with a pardonable egotism, that that poor gentleman, whose head is full of his bill-book and renewals, and possible executions, and preparing to deceive a villainous omniscience, and to move the compassion of Pandemonium—is thinking of *him*, and mistaking him, possibly, for a peer, or for some other type of aristocracy.

The sight of that unfortunate fellow, Tomlinson, with a wife and a seedy hat, and children, and a cotton umbrella, whose little business was possibly about to be knocked about

his ears, moved a lordly pity in Mr. Larkin's breast, and suggested contrasts, also, of many kinds, that were calculated to elate his good humour; and as he stepped into the cab, and the driver waited to know "where," he thought he might as well look in upon the recluse of Rosemary-court, and give him, of course with the exquisite tact that was peculiar to him, a hint or two in favour of reason and moderation; for really it *was quite* true what Mr. Levi had said about the preposterous presumption of a person in Mr. Dingwell's position affecting the airs of a dictator.

So being in the mood to deliver a lecture, to the residence of that uncomfortable old gentleman he drove, and walked up the flagged passage to the flagged court-yard, and knocked at the door, and looked up at the square ceiling of sickly sky, and strode up the narrow stairs after Mrs. Rumble.

"How d'ye do, sir? Your soul quite well, I trust. Your spiritual concerns flourishing to-day?" was the greeting of Mr. Dingwell's mocking voice.

"Thanks, Mr. Dingwell; I'm very well," answered Mr. Larkin, with a bow which was meant to sober Mr. Dingwell's mad humour.

Sarah Rumble, as we know, had a defined fear of Mr. Dingwell, but also a vague terror; for there was a great deal about him ill-omened and mysterious. There was a curiosity, too, active within her, intense and rather ghastly, about all that concerned him. She did not care, therefore, to get up and go away from the small hole in the carpet which she was darning on the lobby, and through the door she heard faintly some talk she didn't understand, and Mr. Dingwell's voice, at a high pitch, said—

"D—— you, sir, do you think I'm a fool? Don't you think I've *your letter*, and a copy of my own? If we draw swords, egad, sir, mine's the longer and sharper, as you'll feel. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, lawk!" gasped Sarah Rumble, standing up, and expecting the clash of rapiers.

"Your face, sir, is as white and yellow—you'll excuse me—as an old turban. I beg your pardon; but I want you to understand that I see you're frightened, and that I won't be bullied *by* you."

"I don't suppose, sir, you meditate totally ruining yourself," said Mr. Larkin, with dignity.

"I tell you, sir, if anything goes wrong with me, I'll make a clean breast of it—*everything*—ha, ha, ha! —upon my honour—and we two shall grill together."

Larkin had no idea he was going in for so hazardous and huge a game when he sat down to play. His vision was circumscribed, his prescience small. He looked at the beast he had imported, and wished him in a deep grave in Scutari, the scheme quashed, and the stakes drawn.

But wishing would not do. The spirit was evoked—in nothing more manageable than at first; on the contrary, rather more insane. Nerve was needed, subtlety, compliance, and he must manage him.

"Why the devil did you bring me here, sir, if you were not prepared to treat me properly? You know my circumstances, and you want to practise on my misfortunes, you vile rogue, to mix me up in your fraudulent machinations."

"Pray, sir, not so loud. Do—*do* command yourself," remonstrated Larkin, almost affectionately.

"Do you think I'm come all this way, at the risk of my life, to be *your* slave, you shabby, canting attorney? I'd better be where I was, or in kingdom come. By Allah! sir, you *have* me, and I'm your *master*, and you shan't have my soul for nothing."

There came a loud knock at the hall-door, and if it had been a shot and killed them both, the debaters in the drawing-room could not have been more instantaneously and breathlessly silent.

Down glided Sarah Rumble, who had been expecting this visit, to pay the taxman.

And she had hardly taken his receipt, when Mr. Larkin, very pink, endeavouring to smile in his discomfiture, and observing with a balmy condescension, "A sweet day, Mrs. Rumble," appeared, shook his ears a little, and adjusted his hat, and went forth, and Rosemary-court saw him no more for some time.

CHAPTER LVI.

IN VERNEY HOUSE.

Mr. Larkin got into his cab, and ordered the cabman, in a loud voice, to drive to Verney House.

"Didn't he know Verney House? He thought every cabman in London knew Verney House! The house of Lord Viscount Verney, in ——square. Why it fills up a whole side of it!"

He looked at his watch. He had twenty-seven minutes to reach it in. It was partly to get rid of a spare half hour, that he had paid his unprofitable visit to Rosemary-court.

Mr. Larkin registered a vow to confer no more with Mr. Dingwell. He eased his feelings by making a note of this resolution in that valuable little memorandum book which he carried about with him in his pocket.

"*Saw Mr. Dingwell this day—as usual impracticable and ill-bred to a hopeless degree—waste of time and worse—resolved that this gentleman being inaccessible to reason, is not to be argued, but DEALT with, should occasion hereafter arise for influencing his conduct.*"

Somewhere about Temple-bar, Mr. Larkin's cab got locked in a string of vehicles, and he put his head out of the window, not being sorry for an opportunity of astonishing the citzens by calling to the driver—

"I say, my good fellow, can't you get on? I told Lord Verney to expect me at half past one. Do, pray, get me out of this, *any* way, and you shall have a gratuity of half-a-crown. Verney House is a good step from this. Do try. His lordship will be as much obliged to you as I am."

Mr. Larkin's assiduities and flatteries were, in truth, telling upon Lord Verney, with whom he was stealing into a general confidence which alarmed many people, and which Cleve Verney hated more than ever.

With the pretty mansion of Hazelden, the relations, as Lord Verney would have said of the House of Ware, were no longer friendly. This was another instance of the fragility of human arrangements, and the vanity of human hopes. The altar had been erected, the swine sacrificed, and the augurs and haruspices on both sides had predicted nothing but amity and concord. Game, fruit, and venison, went and came,—"Much good may it do your good heart." "It was ill-killed," &c. Master Shallow and Master Page could not have been more courteous on such occasions. But on the *fete champetre* had descended a sudden procella. The roses were whirling high in the darkened air, the flatteries and laughter were drowned in thunder, and the fiddles smashed with hailstones as large as potatoes.

A general election had come and gone, and in that brief civil war old Vane Etherage was found at the wrong side. In Lord Verney's language neighbour meant something like vassal, and Etherage who had set up his banners and arrayed his power on the other side, was a rebel. The less forgivable that he had, as was authentically demonstrated, by this step himself inflicted that defeat in the county which had wounded Lord Verney to the quick.

So silence descended upon the interchange of civil speeches; the partridges and pheasants, winged from Ware in a new direction, and old Vane Etherage stayed his friendly hand also; and those tin cases of Irish salmon, from the old gentleman's fisheries, packed in ice, as fresh as if they had sprung from the stream only half an hour before, were no longer known at Ware; and those wonderful fresh figs, green and purple, which Lord Verney affected, for which Hazleden is famous, and which Vane Etherage was fond of informing his guests were absolutely unequalled in any part of the known world. England could not approach them for bulk and ripeness, nor foreign parts—and he had eaten figs wherever figs grow—for aroma and flavour, no longer crossed the estuary. Thus this game of beggar-my-neighbour began. Lord Verney recalled his birds, and Mr. Etherage withdrew his figs. Mr. Etherage lost his great black grapes; and Lord Verney sacrificed his salmon, and in due time Lord Verney played a writ, and invited an episode in a court of law, and another, more formidable, in the Court of Chancery.

So the issues of war were knit

again, and Vane Etherage was now informed by his lawyers there were some very unpleasant questions mooted affecting his title to the Windermore estate, for which he paid a trifling rent to the Verneys.

So, when Larkin went into Verney House he was closetted with its noble master for a good while, and returning to a smaller library—devoted to blue books and pamphlets—where he had left a despatch-box and umbrella during his wait for admission to his noble client, he found Cleve busy there.

"Oh, Mr. Larkin. How d'ye do? Anything to say to me?" said the handsome young man, whose eye looked angry though he smiled.

"Ah, thanks. No, *no*, Mr. Verney. I hope and trust I see you well; but no, I had not any communication to make. Shall I be honoured, Mr. Verney, with any communication from you?"

"I've nothing to say, thanks, except of course to say how much obliged I am for the very particular interest you take in my affairs.

"I should be eminently gratified, Mr. Verney, to merit your approbation, but I fear, sir, as yet I can hardly hope to have merited your thanks," said Mr. Larkin, modestly.

"You won't let me thank you; but I quite understand the nature and extent of your kindness. My uncle is by no means so reserved, and he has told me very frankly the care you have been so good as to take of me. He's more obliged even than I am, and so, I am told, is Lady Wimbledon also.

Cleve had said a great deal more than at starting he had at all intended. It would have been easy to him to have dismissed the attorney without allusion to the topic that made him positively hateful in his eyes; but it was not easy to hint at it, and quite command himself also, and the result illustrated the general fact that total abstinence is easier than moderation.

Now the effect of this little speech of Cleve's upon the attorney, was to abash Mr. Larkin, and positively to confound him, in a degree quite unusual in a Christian so armed on most occasions with that special grace called presence of mind. The blood mounted to his hollow cheeks, and up to the summit of his tall bald head; his eyes took their rat-like character, and looked dangerously in his for a second, and then down to the floor, and scanned his own boots; and he bit his lip, and essayed a little laugh, and tried to look innocent, and broke down in the attempt. He cleared his voice once or twice to speak, but said nothing; and all this time Cleve gave him no help whatsoever, but enjoyed his evident confusion with an angry sneer.

"I hope Mr. Cleve Verney," at length Mr. Larkin began, "where duty and expediency pull in opposite directions, I shall always be found at the right side."

"The winning side at all events," said Cleve.

"The *right* side, I venture to repeat. It has been my misfortune to be misunderstood more than once in the course of my life. It is our duty to submit to misinterpretation, as to other afflictions, patiently. I hope I have done so. My first duty is to my client."

"*I*'m no client of yours, sir."

"Well, conceding that, sir, to your *uncle*—to Lord *Verney*, I will say—to his views of what the interests of his house demand, and to his feelings."

"Lord Verney has been good enough to consult *me*, hitherto, upon this subject—a not quite unnatural confidence, I venture to think—more than you seem to suspect. He seems to think, and so do I, that I've a voice in it, and has not left me absolutely in the hands—in a matter of so much importance and delicacy—of his country lawyer."

"I had no power in this case, sir; not even of mentioning the subject to you, who certainly, in one view, are more or less affected by it."

"Thank you for the concession," sneered Cleve.

"I make it unaffectedly, Mr. Cleve Verney," replied Larkin, graciously.

"My uncle, Lord Verney, has given me leave to talk to you upon the subject. I venture to decline that privilege. I prefer speaking to him. He seems to think that *I* ought to be allowed to advise a little in the matter, and that with every respect for *his* wishes; *mine* also are entitled to be a little considered. Should I ever talk to you, Mr. Larkin, it shan't be to ask your advice. I'm detaining

you, sir, and I'm also a little busy myself."

Mr. Larkin looked at the young man for a second or two a little puzzled; but encountering only a look of stern impatience, he made his best bow, and the conference ended.

A few minutes later in came our old friend, Tom Sedley.

"Oh! Sedley? Very glad to see you here; but I thought you did not want to see my uncle just now; and this is the most likely place, except the library, to meet him in."

"He's gone; I saw him go out this moment. I should not have come in otherwise; and you mustn't send me away, dear Cleve, I'm in such awful trouble. Everything has gone wrong with us at Hazelden. You know that quarrying company—the slates—that *odious* fellow, Larkin, led him into, before the election—and all the other annoyances began."

"You mean the Llandrwyd company?"

"Yes; so I do."

"But that's quite ruined, you know. Sit down."

"I know. He has lost—frightfully—and Mr. Etherage must pay up ever so much in calls beside; and unless he can get it on a mortgage of the Windermore estate, he can't possibly pay them—and I've been trying, and the result is just this—they won't lend it anywhere till the litigation is settled."

"Well, what can I do?" said Cleve, yawning stealthily into his hand, and looking very tired. I am afraid these tragic confidences of Tom Sedley's did not interest Cleve very much; rather bored him, on the contrary.

"They won't lend, I say, while this litigation is pending."

"Depend upon it they won't," acquiesced Cleve.

"And in the mean time, you know, Mr. Etherage would be ruined."

"Well, I see; but, I say again, what can I do?"

"I want you to try if anything can be done with Lord Verney," said Tom, beseechingly.

"Talk to my uncle? I wish, dear Tom, you could teach me how to do that."

"It can't do any harm, Cleve—it can't," urged Tom Sedley, piteously.

"Nor one particle of good. You might as well talk to that picture—I do assure you, you might."

"But it could be no pleasure to him to ruin Mr. Etherage!"

"I'm not so sure of that; between ourselves, forgiving is not one of his weaknesses."

"But I say it's quite impossible—an old family, and liked in the county—it would be a scandal for ever!" pleaded Tom Sedley, distractedly.

"Not worse than that business of Booth Fanshawe," said Cleve, looking down; "no, he never forgives anything. I don't think he perceives he's taking a revenge; he has not *mind* enough for repentance," said Cleve, who was not in good humour with his uncle just then.

"Won't you try? you're such an eloquent fellow, and there's really so much to be said."

"I do assure you, there's no more use than in talking to the chimney-piece; but if you make a point of it, I will; but, by Jove, you could hardly choose a worse advocate just now, for he's teasing me to do what I *can't* do. If you heard my miserable story, it would make you laugh; it's like a thing in a *petit comedie*, and it's breaking my heart."

"Well, then, you'll try—won't you try?" said Tom, overlooking his friend's description of his own troubles.

"Yes; as you desire it, I'll try; but I don't expect the slightest good from it, and possibly some mischief," he replied.

"A thousand thanks, my dear Cleve; I'm going down to-night. Would it be too much to ask you for a line, or, if it's *good* news, a telegram to Lluinan?"

"I may safely promise you that, I'm sorry to say, without risk of trouble. You mustn't think me unkind, but it would be cruel to let you hope when there is not, really, a chance."

So Tom drove away to his club, to write his daily love-letter to Agnes Etherage, in time for post; and to pen a few lines for old Vane Etherage, and try to speak comfortably to that family, over whose roof had gathered an awful storm.

CHAPTER LVII.

"That night a child might understand
The de'il had business on his hand."

I ENDED my last chapter with mention of a metaphoric storm; but a literal storm broke over the city of London on that night, such as its denizens remembered for many a day after. The lightning seemed, for more than an hour, the continuous pulsations of light from a sulphurous furnace, and the thunder pealed with the cracks and rattlings of one long roar of artillery. The children, waked by the din, cried in their beds in terror, and Sarah Rumble got her dress about her, and said her prayers in panic.

After a while the intervals between the awful explosions were a little more marked, and Miss Rumble's voice could be heard by the children, comforting and reassuring in the brief lulls; although had they known what a fright their comforter was herself in, their confidence in her would have been impaired.

Perhaps there was a misgiving in Sarah Rumble's mind that the lightnings and thunders of irate heaven were invoked by the presence of her mysterious lodger. Was even she herself guiltless, in hiding under her roof-tree that impious old sinner, whom Rosemary-court disgorged at dead of night, as the churchyard does a ghost—about whose past history—whose doings and whose plans, except that they were wicked—she knew no more than about those of an evil spirit, had she chanced, in one of her spectre-seeing moods, to spy one moving across the lobby.

His talk was so cold and wicked; his temper so fiendish; his nocturnal disguises and outgoings so obviously pointed to secret guilt; and his relations with the meek Mr. Larkin, and with those potent Jews, who, grumbling and sullen, yet submitted to his caprices, as genii to those of the magician who has the secret of command,—that Mr. Dingwell had in her eyes something of a supernatural horror surrounding him. In the thunderstorm, Sarah Rumble vowed secretly to reconsider the religious propriety of harbouring this old man; and amid these qualms, it was with something of fear and anger that, in a silence between the peals of the now subsiding storm, she heard the creak of his shoe upon the stair.

That even on such a night, with the voice of divine anger in the air, about his ears, he could not forego his sinister excursions, and for once at these hours remain decorously in his rooms! Her wrath overcame her fear of him. She would *not* have her house burnt and demolished over her head, with thunderbolts, for *his* doings.

She went forth, with her candle in her hand, and stood at the turn of the banister, confronting Mr. Dingwell, who, also furnished with a candle, was now about mid-way down the last flight of stairs.

"Egeria, in the thunder!" exclaimed the hard, scoffing tones of Mr. Dingwell; whom, notwithstanding her former encounter with him, she would hardly have recognized in his ugly disguise.

"A hoffle night for anyone to go out, sir;" she said, rather sternly, with a courtesy at the same time.

"Hoffle, is it?" said Mr. Dingwell, amused, with mock gravity.

"The hofflest, sir, I think I hever 'ave remembered."

"Why, ma'am, it isn't *raining;* I put my hand out of the window. There's none of that hoffle rain, ma'am, that gives a fellow rheumatism. I hope there's no unusual fog—is there?"

"*There*, sir;" exclaimed she, as a long and loud peal rattled over Rosemary-court, with a blue glare through the lobby window and the fanlight in the hall. She paused, and lifted her hand and eyes till it subsided, and then murmured an ejaculation.

"I like thunder, my dear. It reminds me of your name, dear Miss Rumble;" and he prolonged the name with a rolling pronunciation. "Shakespeare, you know, who says everything better than anyone else in the world, makes that remarkable old gentleman, King Lear, say, 'Thunder, *rumble* thy bellyfull!' Of course, *I* would not say *that* in a drawing-

room, or to you; but kings are so refined they may say things *we* can't, and a genius like Shakespeare hits it off."

"I would not go out, sir, on such a night, except I was very sure it was about something *good* I was a-going," said Miss Rumble, very pale.

"You labour under electro-phobia, my dear ma'am, and mistake it for piety. I'm not a bit afraid of that sort of artillery, madam. Here we are, two or three millions of people in this town; and two or three millions of shots, and we'll see by the papers, I venture to say, not one shot tells. Don't you think if Jupiter really meant mischief he could manage something better?"

"I know, sir, it ought to teach us" —here she winced and paused; for another glare, followed by another bellow of the thunder, "long, loud, and deep," interposed. "It should teach us some godly fear, if we has none by nature."

Mr. Dingwell looked at his watch.

"Oh! Mr. Dingwell, it is hoffle. I wish you would only see it, sir."

"*See* the *thunder*—eh?"

"My poor mother. She always made us go down on our knees, and say our prayers—she would—while the thunder was."

"You'd have had rather long prayers to-night. How your knees must have ached—egad! I don't wonder you dread it, Miss Sarah."

"And so I *do*, Mr. Dingwell, and so I should. Which I think all other sinners should dread it also."

"Meaning *me*?"

"And take warning of the wrath to come."

Here was another awful clap.

"Hoffle it is, Mr. Dingwell, and a warnin' to *you*, sent special, mayhap."

"Hardly fair to disturb all the town for *me*, don't you think?"

"You're an old man, Mr. Dingwell."

"And you're an old woman, Miss Sarah," said he—not caring to be reminded of his years by other people, though he playfully called himself on occasions an old "boy"—"as old as Abraham's wife, whose name-sake you are, though you have not lighted on an Abraham yet, nor become the mother of a great nation."

"Old enough to be good enough, as my poor mother used to say, sir; I am truly; and sorry I am, Mr. Dingwell, to see you, on this hoffle night, bent on no good. I'm afraid, sir—oh, sir, sir, oughtn't you think, with them sounds in your ears, Mr. Dingwell?"

"The most formidable thunder, my dear Sarah, proceeds from the silvery tongue of woman. I can stand any other. *It* frightens me. So, egad, if you please, I'll take refuge in the open air, and go out, and patter a prayer."

And with a nod and a smirk, having had enough fooling, he glided by Miss Rumble, who made him an appalled courtesy, and, setting down his candle on the hall-table, he said, touching his false whiskers with his finger tips, "Mind, not a word about these—By —— you'd *better* not."

She made another courtesy. He stopped and looked at her for an answer.

"Can't you *speak*?" he said.

"No, sir—sure—not a word," she faltered.

"Good girl!" he said, and opened the door, with his latch-key in his pocket, on pitchy darkness, which instantaneously illuminated by the lightning, and another awful roar of thunder broke over their heads.

"The voice of heaven in warning!" she murmured to herself, as she stood by the banisters, dazzled by the gleam, and listening to the reverberation ringing in her ears. "I pray God he may turn back yet."

He looked over his shoulder.

"Another shot, Miss Rumble—missed again, you see." He nodded, stepped out into darkness, and shut the door. She heard his steps in the silence that followed, traversing the flags of the court.

"Oh dear! but I wish he *was* gone, right out—a hoffle old man he is. There's a weight on my conscience like, and a fright in my heart, there is, ever since he camed into the 'ouse. He is so presumptuous. To see that hold man made hup with them rings and whiskers, like a robber or a play-actor! And defyin' the blessed thunder of heaven—a walking hout, a mockin' and darin' it, at these hours—Oh law!"

The interjection was due to another flash and peal.

"I wouldn't wonder—no more I would—if that flash was the death o' 'im!"

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE PALE HORSE.

SALLY RUMBLE knocked at the usual hour at the old man's door next morning.

"Come in, ma'am," he answered, in a weary, peevish voice. "Open the window-shutter, and give me some light, and hand me my watch, please."

All which she did.

"I have not closed my eyes from the time I lay down."

"Not ailing, sir, I hope?"

"Just allow me to count, and I'll tell you, my dear."

He was trying his pulse.

"Just as I thought, egad. The pale horse in the Revelation, ma'am, he's running a gallop in my pulse; it has been threatening the last three days, and now I'm in for it, and I should not be surprised, Miss Sally, if it ended in a funeral in our alley."

"God forbid, sir."

"Amen, with all my heart. Ay, the pale horse; my head's splitting; oblige me with the looking-glass, and a little less light will answer. Thank you—very good. Just draw the curtain open at the foot of the bed; please, hold it nearer—thank you. Yes, a ghost, ma'am—ha, ha—at last, I do suppose. My eyes, too—I've seen pits, with the water drying up, hollow—ay, ay; sunk—and—now—did you see? Well, look at my tongue—here"—and he made the demonstration; "you never saw a worse tongue than *that*, I fancy; that tongue, ma'am, is eloquent, *I* think."

"Please God, sir, you'll soon be better."

"Draw the curtain a bit more; the light falls oddly, or—does it?—my face. Did you ever see, ma'am, a face so nearly the colour of a coffin-plate?"

"Don't be talking, sir, please, of no such thing," said Sally Rumble, taking heart of grace, for women generally pluck up a spirit when they see a man floored by sickness. "I'll make you some whey or barley-water, or would you like some weak tea better?"

"Ay; will you draw the curtain close again, and take away the looking-glass? Thanks. I believe I've drunk all the water in the carafe. Whey—well, I suppose it's the right thing; *caudle* when we're coming *in*, and *whey*, ma'am, when we're going *out*. Baptism of Infants, Burial of the Dead! My poor mother, how she did put us through the prayer-book, and Bible—Bible. Dear me."

"There's a very good man, sir, please—the Rev. Doctor Bartlett, though he's gone rather old. He came in, and read a deal, and prayed, every day with my sister when she was sick, poor thing."

"Bartlett? What's his Christian name? You need not speak loud—it plays the devil with my head."

"The Reverend Thomas Bartlett, please, sir."

"Of Jesus?"

"What, sir, please?"

"Jesus *College*."

"Don't know, I'm sure, sir."

"Is he old?"

"Yes, sir, past seventy."

"Ha—well I don't care a farthing about him," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Will you, please, have in the apothecary, sir? I'll fetch him directly, if you wish."

"No—*no* apothecary, *no* clergyman; I don't believe in the Apostles' Creed, ma'am, and I do believe in the jokes about apothecaries. If I'm to go, I'll go quietly, if you please."

Honest Sally Rumble was heavy at heart to see this old man, who certainly did look ghastly enough to suggest ideas of the undertaker and the sexton, in so unsatisfactory a plight as to his immortal part. Was he a Jew?—there wasn't a hair on his chin—or a Roman Catholic?—or a member of any one of those multitudinous forms of faith which she remembered in a stout volume, adorned with woodcuts, and entitled "A Dictionary of all Religions," in the back parlour of her granduncle, the tallow-chandler?

"Give me a glass of cold water, ma'am," said the subject of her solicitude.

"Thank you—that's the best drink. *Slop*, I think you call it, a sick man can swallow.

Sally Rumble coughed a little, and fidgeted, and at last she said: "Please, sir, would you wish I should fetch any other sort of a minister?"

"Don't plague me, pray; I believe

in the prophet Rabelais and *je m'en vais chercher un grand peut être*—the two great chemists, Death, who is going to analyse, and Life, to recombine me. I tell you, ma'am, my head is splitting; I'm very ill; I'll talk no more."

She hesitated. She lingered in the room, in her great perplexity; and Mr. Dingwell lay back, with a groan.

"I'll tell you what you may do: go down to your landlord's office, and be so good as to say to either of those d——d Jew fellows—I don't care which—that I am as you see me; it mayn't signify, it may blow over; but I've an idea it is serious; and tell them I said they had better know that I am *very ill*, and that I've taken no step about it."

With another weary groan Mr. Dingwell let himself down on his pillow, and felt worse for his exertion, and very tired and stupid, and odd about the head, and would have been very glad to fall asleep; and with one odd pang of fear, sudden and cold, at his heart, he thought, "I'm going to die at last—I'm going to die at last—I'm going to die."

The physical nature in sickness acquiesces in death; it is the instructed mind that recoils; and the more versed about the unseen things of futurity, unless when God, as it were, prematurely glorifies it, the more awfully it recoils.

Mr. Dingwell was not more afraid than other sinners who have lived for the earthy part of their nature, and have taken futurity pretty much for granted, and are now going to test by the stake of *themselves* the value of their loose guesses.

No; he had chanced a great many things, and they had turned out for the most part better than he expected. Oh! no; the whole court, and the adjoining lanes, and, in short, the whole city of London, must go as he would—lots of company, it was not to be supposed it was anything very bad—and he was so devilish tired, *over*-fatigued—queer—worse than seasickness—that headache—fate—the change—an end—what was it? At all events, a rest, a sleep—sleep—could not be very bad; lots of sleep, sir, and the chance—the chance—oh, yes, things go pretty well, and I have not had my good luck yet. I wish I could sleep a bit—yes, let kingdom-come be all sleep"—and so a groan, and the brain duller, and more pain, and the immense fatigue that demands the enormous sleep.

When Sarah Rumble returned, Mr. Dingwell seemed, she thought, a great deal heavier. He made no remark, as he used to do, when she entered the room. She came and stood by the bed-side, but he lay with his eyes closed, not asleep; she could see by the occasional motion of his lips, and the fidgety change of his posture, and his weary groanings. She waited for a time in silence.

"Better, sir?" she half-whispered, after a minute or two.

"No," he said, wearily.

Another silence followed, and then she asked, "Would you like a drink, Mr. Dingwell, sir?"

"Yes—water."

So he drank a very little, and lay down again.

Miss Sarah Rumble stayed in the room, and nearly ten minutes passed without a word.

"What did he say?" demanded Mr. Dingwell so abruptly that Sarah Rumble fancied he had been dreaming.

"Who, sir, please?"

"The Jew—landlord," he answered.

"Mr. Levi's a-coming up, sir, please—he expected in twenty minutes," replied she.

Mr. Dingwell groaned; and two or three minutes more elapsed, and silence seemed to have re-established itself in the darkened chamber, when Mr. Dingwell raised himself up with a sudden alacrity, and said he—

"Sarah Rumble, fetch me my desk."—Which she did, from his sitting-room.

"Put your hand under the bolster, and you'll find two keys on a ring, and a pocket-book. *Yes.* Now, Sarah Rumble, unlock that desk. Very good. Put out the papers on the coverlet before me; first bolt the door. Thank you, ma'am. There are a parcel of letters among those, tied across with a red silk cord—just so. Put them in my hand—thank you—and place all the rest back again neatly—*neatly*, if you please. Now lock the desk; replace it, and come here; but first give me pen and ink, and bolt the door again."

And as she did so he scrawled an address upon the blank paper in which these letters were wrapt.

The brown visage of his grave landlady was graver than ever, as she returned to listen for further orders.

"Mrs. Sarah Rumble, I take you for an honest person; and as I may die this time, I make a particular request of *you*—take this little packet, and slip it between the featherbed and the mattrass, as near the centre as your arm will reach—thank you—remember it's there. If I die, ma'am, you'll find a ten-pound note wrapped about it, which I give to you; you need not thank—that will do. The letters addressed as they are you will deliver, without showing them, or *saying one word to anyone* but to the gentleman himself, into whose own hands you must deliver them. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, please; I'm listening."

"Well, *attend.* There are two Jew gentlemen—your landlord, Mr. Levi, and the *old* Jew, who have been with me once or twice—you know *them;* that makes *two;* and there is Mr. Larkin, the tall gentleman who has been twice here with them, with the lavender waistcoat and trousers, the eye-glass with the black ribbon, the black frock coat—heigho! oh, dear, my head!—the red grizzled whiskers, and bald head."

"The religious gentleman, please, sir?"

"Exactly; the religious gentleman. Well, *attend.* The two Jews and the religious gentleman together make *three;* and those three gentlemen are all *robbers.*"

"*What*, sir?"

"*Robbers*—robbers! Don't you know what '*robbers*' means? They are all three *robbers.* Now, I don't think they'll want to fiddle with my money till I'm dead."

"Oh, Lord, sir!"

"'Oh, Lord!' of course. That will do. They won't touch my money till I'm dead, if they trust you; but they *will* want my desk—at least Larkin will. I shan't be able to look after things, for my head is very bad, and I shall be too drowsy—soon knocked up; so give 'em the desk, if they ask for it, and these keys from under the pillow; and if they ask you if there are any other papers, say *no;* and don't you tell them one word about the letters you've put between the beds here. If you betray me—you're a religious woman—yes—and believe in God—may God d—n you; and He will, for you'll be accessory to the villainy of those three miscreants. And now I've done what in me lies; and that is all—my last testament."

And Mr. Dingwell lay down wearily. Sarah Rumble knew that he was very ill; she had attended people in fever, and seen them die. Mr. Dingwell was already perceptibly worse. As she was coming up with some whey, a knock came to the door, and opening it she saw Mr. Levi, with a very surly countenance, and his dark eyes blazing fiercely on her.

"How'sh Dingwell now?" he demanded, before he had time to enter and shut the door; "*worse*, is he?"

"Well, he's duller, sir."

"In his bed? Shut the door."

"Yes, sir, please. Didn't get up this morning. He expected you two hours ago, sir."

Levi nodded.

"What doctor did you fetch?" he asked.

"No doctor, please, sir. I thought you and *him* would choose."

Levi made no answer; so she could not tell by his surly face, which underwent no change, whether he approved or not. He looked at his watch.

"Larkin wasn't here to-day?"

"Mr. Larkin? No, sir, please."

"Show me Dingwell's room, till I have a look at him," said the Jew, gloomily.

So he followed her upstairs, and entered the darkened room without waiting for any invitation, and went to the window, and pulled open a bit of the shutter.

"What's it for?" grumbled Dingwell indistinctly from his bed.

"So you've bin and done it, you have," said the Jew, walking up with his hands in his pockets, and eyeing him from a distance as he might a glandered horse.

Dingwell was in no condition to retort on this swarthy little man, who eyed him with a mixture of disgust and malignity.

"How long has he been thish way," said the Jew, glowering on Sarah Rumble.

"Only to-day in bed, please, sir; but he has bin lookin' awful bad this two or three days, sir."

"Do you back it for *fever?*"

"I think it's *fever*, sir."

"I s'pose you'd twig fever fasht enough? Sheen lotsh of fever in your time?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"It *ish* fever, ten to one in fifties. Black death going, ma'am—*my* luck! Look at him there, d—n him, he'sh got it."

Levi looked at him surlily for a while with eyes that glowed like coals.

"This comsh o' them d—d holes you're always a-going to; there's always fever and everything there, you great old buck goat."

Dingwell made an effort to raise himself, and mumbled, half awake—

"Let me—I'll talk to him—how dare you—when I'm better—*quiet*" —and he laid down his head again.

"When you *are*, you cursed sink. Look at all we've lost by you."

He stood looking at Dingwell savagely.

"He'll *die*," exclaimed he, making an angry nod, almost a butt, with his head toward the patient, and he repeated his prediction with a furious oath.

"See, you'll send down to the apothecary's for that chloride of lime, and them vinegars and things—or—no; you must wait here, for Larkin will come; and don't you let him go, mind. Me and Mr. Goldshed will be here in no time. Tell him the doctor's coming; and us—and I'll send up them things from the apothecary, and you put them all about in plates on the floor and tables. Bad enough to lose our money, and d— bad; but I won't take this—come out o' this room—if *I* can help."

And he entered the drawing-room, shutting Dingwell's door, and spitting on the floor, and then he opened the window.

"He'll *die*—do you *think* he'll die? he exclaimed again.

"He's in the hands of God, sir," said Sally Rumble.

"He won't be long there—he'll die —I say he *will*—by —— he will;" and the little Jew stamped on the floor, and clapped his hat on his head, and ran down the stairs, in a paroxysm of business and fury.

CHAPTER LIX.

IN WHICH HIS FRIENDS VISIT THE SICK.

Mr. Levi, when Sarah Rumble gave him her lodger's message, did not, as he said, "vally it a turn of a halfpenny." He could not be very ill if he could send his attendant out of doors, and deliver the terms in which his messages were to be communicated. Mr. Levi's diagnosis was that Mr. Dingwell's attack was in the region of the purse or pocket-book, and that the "dodge" was simply to get the partners and Mr. Larkin together for the purpose of extracting more money.

Mr. Larkin was in town, and he had written to that gentleman's hotel, also he had told Mr. Goldshed, who took the same view, and laughed in his lazy diapason over the weak invention of the enemy.

Levi accordingly took the matter very easily, and hours had passed before his visit, which was made pretty late in the afternoon, and he was smiling over his superior sagacity in seeing through Dingwell's little dodge, as he walked into the court, when an officious little girl, in her mother's bonnet, running by his knee, said, pompously—

"You'd better not go there, sir."

"And why sho, chickabiddy?" inquired Mr. Levi, derisively.

"No, you better not; there's a gentleman as has took the fever there."

"Where?" said Mr. Levi, suddenly interested.

"In Mrs. Rumble's."

Is there?—how do you know?"

"Lucy Maria Rumble, please, sir, she told me, and he's *very bad.*"

The fashion of Levi's countenance was changed as he turned from her suddenly, and knocked so sharply at the door that the canary, hanging from the window in his cage over the way, arrested his song, and was agitated for an hour afterwards.

So Mr. Levi was now thoroughly

aroused to the danger that had so suddenly overcast his hopes, and threatened to swallow in the bottomless sea of death the golden stake he had ventured.

It was not, nevertheless, until eight o'clock in the evening, so hard a thing is it to collect three given men [what then must be the office of whip to Whig or Tory side of the House ?] that the two Jews and Mr. Larkin were actually assembled in Mr. Dingwell's bed-room, now reeking with disinfectants and prophylactic fluids.

The party were in sore dismay, for the interesting patient had begun to maunder very preposterously in his talk. They listened, and heard him say—

"That's a lie—I say, I'd nail his tongue to the post. Bells won't ring for it — lots of bells in England; you'll not find any *here*, though."

And then it went off into a mumbling, and Mr. Goldshed, who was listening disconsolately, exclaimed, "My eyesh !"

"Well, how do you like it, gov'nor ? I said he'd walk the plank, and so he will," said Levi. "He will—he will ;" and Levi clenched his white teeth, with an oath.

"*There*, Mr. Levi, *pray*, pray, none of *that*," said Mr. Larkin.

The three gentlemen were standing in a row, from afar off observing the patient, with an intense scrutiny of a gloomy and, I may say, a savage kind.

"He was an unfortunate agent—no energy, except for his pleasures," resentfully resumed Mr. Larkin, who was standing furthest back of the three speculators. "Indolent, impracticable enough to ruin fifty cases; and now here he lies in a fever, contracted, you think, Mr. Levi, in some of his abominable haunts."

Mr. Larkin did not actually say "d— him," but he threw a very dark, sharp look upon his acquaintance in the bed.

"Abawminable, to be sure, abawminable. Bah ! It's all true. The hornies has their eye on him these seven weeks past—curse the beasht," snarled Mr. Levi, clenching his fists in his pockets, "and every da—a—am muff that helped to let me in for this here rotten business."

"Meaning *me*, sir ?" said Mr. Larkin, flushing up to the top of his head a fierce pink.

Levi answered nothing, and Mr. Larkin did not press his question.

It is very easy to be companionable and good-humoured while all goes pleasantly. It is failure, loss, and disappointment, that try the sociable qualities; even those three amiable men felt less amicable under the cloud than they had under the sunshine.

So they all three looked in their several ways angrily and thoughtfully at the gentleman in the typhus fever, who said rather abruptly—

"She killed herself, sir; foolish 'oman ! Capital dancing, gentleman ! Capital dancing, ladies ! Capital—capital — admirable dancing. God help us !" and so it sunk again into mumbling.

"Capital da-a-ancing, and who pays the piper ?" asked Mr. Goldshed, with a rather ferocious sneer. It has cost us five hundred to a thousand."

"And a doctor," suggested Levi.

"Doctor, the devil ! I say; I've paid through the nose," or as he pronounced that organ through which his metallic declamation droned, *noshe*. "It's Mr. Larkin's turn now; its all da-a-am rot; a warm fellow like you, Mr. Larkin, putting all the loss on me; how can I sta-a-an' that—sta-a-an' all the losses, and share the profits—ba-a-ah, sir; that couldn't pay nohow."

"I think," said Mr. Larkin, "it may be questionable how far a physician would be, just in this imminent stage of the attack, at all useful, or even desirable; but, Miss Rumble, if I understand you, he is quite *compos* —I mean, quite, so to speak, in his senses, in the early part of the day.

He paused, and Miss Rumble from the other side of the bed contributed her testimony.

"Well, that being so," began Mr. Larkin, but stopped short as Mr. Dingwell took up his parable, forgetting how wide of the mark the sick man's interpolations were.

"There's a vulture over there," said Mr. Dingwell's voice, with an unpleasant distinctness; "you just tie a turban on a stick," and then he was silent.

Mr. Larkin cleared his voice and resumed—

"Well, as I was saying, when the attack, whatever it is, has developed itself, a medical man may possibly

be available; but in the mean time, as he is spared the possession of his faculties, and we all agree, gentlemen, whatever particular form of faith may be respectively ours, that some respect is due to futurity; I would say, that a clergyman, at all events, might make him advantageously a visit to-morrow, and afford him an opportunity at least of considering the interests of his soul."

"Oh! da-a-am his shoul, it's his *body*. We must try to keep him together," said Mr. Goldshed impatiently. "If he dies the money's all lost, every shtiver; if he don't, he's a sound speculation; we must raise a doctor among us, Mr. Larkin."

"It is highly probable indeed that before long the unfortunate gentleman may require medical advice," said Mr. Larkin, who had a high opinion of the "speculation," whose pulse was at this moment unfortunately at a hundred and twenty. "The fever, my dear sir, if such it be, will have declared itself in a day or two; in the mean time, nursing is all that is really needful, and Miss Rumble, I have no doubt, will take care that the unhappy gentleman is properly provided in that respect."

The attorney, who did not want at that moment to be drawn into a discussion on contributing to expenses, smiled affectionately on Miss Rumble, to whom he assigned the part of good Samaritan.

"He'll want some one at night, sir, please; I could not undertake myself, sir, for both day and night," said brown Miss Rumble, very quietly.

"*There!* That'sh it!" exclaimed Levi, with a vicious chuckle, and a scowl, extending his open hand energetically toward Miss Rumble, and glaring from Mr. Larkin to his partner.

"Nothing but *pay;* down with the dust, Goldshed and Levi. Bleed like a pair o' beashtly pigs, Goldshed and Levi, *do!* There's death in that fellow's face, I say. It's all bosh, doctors and nurses; throwing good money after bad, and then, five pounds to bury him, drat him!"

"Bury? ho! no, the parish, the workhoushe, the authorities shall bury him," said Mr. Goldshed, briskly.

"Dead as a Mameluke, dead as a Janizary bowstrung!" exclaimed Mr. Dingwell, and went off into an indistinct conversation in a foreign language.

"Stuff a stocking down his throat, will you?" urged Mr. Levi; a duty, however, which no one undertook. "I see that cove's booked; he looks just like old Solomons looked when *he* had it. It isn't no use; all rot, throwing good money arter bad, I say; let him be; let him die."

"I'll *not* let him die; no, he shan't. I'll *make* him pay. I made the Theatre of Fascination pay," said Mr. Goldshed serenely, alluding to a venture of his devising, by which the partnership made ever so much money in spite of a prosecution and heavy fines and other expenses. "I say 'tisn't my principle to throw up the game, by no means—*no*—with my ball in hand and the stakes in the pocket—*never!*"

Here Mr. Goldshed wagged his head slowly with a solemn smile, and Mr. Dingwell, from the bed, said—

"Move it, will you? That way—I wish you'd help—b-bags, sir—sacks, sir—awfully hard lying—full of ears and noses—egad!—why not?—cut them all off, I say. D—n the Greeks! Will you move it? *Do* move that sack—it hurts his ribs—ribs—*I* never got the bastinado."

"Not but what you deserved it," remarked Mr. Levi.

And Mr. Dingwell's babbling went on, but too indistinctly to be unravelled.

"I say," continued Mr. Goldshed, sublimely, "if that 'ere speculative thing in the bed there comes round, and gets all square and right, I'll make him pay. I'm not funked—who's afraid?—wiry old brick!"

"I think so," acquiesced Mr. Larkin with gentle solemnity; "Mr. Dingwell is certainly, as you say, wiry. There are many things in his favour, and Providence, Mr. Goldshed—Providence is over us all."

"Providence, to be sure," said Mr. Goldshed, who did not disdain help from any quarter. "Where does he keep his money, ma'am?"

"Under his bolster, please, sir—under his head," answered Sarah Rumble.

"Take it out, please," said Mr. Goldshed.

She hesitated.

"*Give* the man hish money, woman, ca-a-an't you?" bawled Mr. Levi

fiercely, and extending his arm toward the bed.

"You had better—*yes*, ma'am, the money belongs to Messrs. Goldshed and Levi," said Mr. Larkin, interposing in the character of the *vir pietate gravis.*

Sally Rumble, recollecting Mr. Dingwell's direction, "Let 'em have the money, too, if they press for it," obeyed, and slid her hand under his bolster, and under his head, from the other side, where she was standing; and Dingwell, feeling the motion, I suppose, raised his head and stared with sunken eyes dismally at the three gentlemen, whom he plainly did not recognise, or possibly saw in the shapes of foxes, wolves, or owls, which Æsop would have metaphorically assigned them, and with a weary groan he closed his wandering eyes again, and sank down on the pillow.

Miss Rumble drew forth a roll of bank notes with a string tied round them.

"Take the money, Levi," said Goldshed, drawing a step backward.

"Take it yourself, gov'nor," said Levi, waving back Miss Sally Rumble, and edging back a little himself.

"Well," said Goldshed, quietly, "I see you're afraid of that infection."

"I believe you," answered Levi.

"So am I," said Goldshed, uneasily.

"And no wonder!" added Mr. Larkin, anticipating himself an invitation to accept the questionable trust.

"Put them notes down on the table there," said Mr. Goldshed.

And the three gentlemen eyed the precious roll of paper as I have seen people at a chemical lecture eye the explodable compounds on the professor's table.

"I tell you what, ma'am," said Goldshed, "you'll please get a dry bottle and a cork, and put them notes into it, and cork it down, ma'am, and give it to Mr. Levi."

"And count them first, please, Miss Rumble—shan't she, Mr. Goldshed?" suggested Mr. Larkin.

"What for?—isn't the money ours?" howled Mr. Levi, with a ferocious stare on the attorney's meek face.

"Only, Mr. Goldshed, with a view to distinctness, and to prevent possible confusion in any future account," said Mr. Larkin, who knew that Dingwell had got money from the Verneys, and thought that if there was anything recovered from the wreck, he had as good a right to his salvage as another.

Mr. Goldshed met his guileless smile with an ugly sneer, and said—

"Oh, count them, to be sure, for the gentleman. It isn't a ha'penny to me."

So Miss Rumble counted seventy-five pounds in bank notes and four pounds in gold, two of which Mr. Goldshed committed to her in trust for the use of the patient, and the remainder were duly bottled and corked down according to Mr. Goldshed's grotesque precaution, and in this enclosure Mr. Levi consented to take the money in hand, and so it was deposited for the night in the iron safe in Messrs. Goldshed and Levi's office, to be uncorked in the morning by old Solomons, the cashier, who would, no doubt, be puzzled by the peculiarity of the arrangement, and with the aid of a cork-screw, lodged to the credit of the firm.

Mr. Goldshed next insisted that Dingwell's life, fortunately for that person, was too important to the gentlemen assembled there to be trifled with; and said that sage—

"We'll have the best doctor in London—six pounds' worth of *him*—d'ye see? And under him a clever *young* doctor to look in four times a day, and we'll arrange with the young 'un on the principle of no cure no pay—that is, we'll give fifty pounds this day six weeks, if the party in bed here is alive at that date."

And upon this basis I believe an arrangement was actually completed. The great Doctor Langley, when he called, and questioned Miss Rumble, and inspected the patient, told Mr. Levi, who was in waiting, that the old gentleman had been walking about in a fever for more than a week before he took to his bed, and that the chances were very decidedly against his recovery.

A great anxiety overcame Mr. Larkin like a summer cloud, and the serene sunshine of that religious mind was overcast with storm and blackness. For the recovery of Mr. Dingwell were offered up, in one synagogue at least, prayers as fervent as any ever made for that of our

early friend Charles Surface, and it was plain that never was patriarch, saint, or hero, mourned as the venerable Mr. Dingwell would be, by at least three estimable men, if the fates were to make away with him on this critical occasion.

The three gentlemen as they left his room on the evening I have been describing, cast their eyes upon Mr. Dingwell's desk, and hesitated, and looked at one another, darkly, for a moment in silence.

"There'sh no reashon why we shouldn't," drawled Mr. Goldshed.

"I object to the removal of the desk," said Mr. Larkin, with a shake of his head, closing his eyes, and raising his hand as if about to pronounce a benediction on the lid of it. "If he is spared it might become a very serious thing—I decidedly object."

"Who want'sh to take this man'sh desk?" drawled Mr. Goldshed, surlily.

"Who want'sh to take it?" echoed Levi, and stared at him with an angry gape.

"But there will be no harm, I shay, in looking what paper'sh there," continued Mr. Goldshed. "Does he get letters?"

"Only two, sir, please, as I can remember, since he came here."

"By po-sht, or by ha-a-an'?" inquired Goldshed.

"By 'and, sir, please; it was your Mr. Solomons as fetched 'em here, sir."

He lifted up the desk, swayed it gently, and shook it a little, looking at it as if it were a musical box about to strike up, and so set it down again softly. "There'sh papersh in that box," he hummed thoughtfully to himself.

"I think I may speak here," said Mr. Larkin, looking up sadly and loftily, as he placed his hat upon his bald head, "with some little authority as a professional man—if in no higher capacity—and I may take upon myself to say, that by no possibility can the contents of that desk affect the very simple and, in a certain sense, direct transactions in which our clients' interests, and in a degree ours also, are involved, and I object on higher grounds still, I hope, to any irregularity as respects that desk."

"If you're confident, Mr. Larkinsh, there'sh nothing in it can affect the bushiness we're on, I would not give you a cancel' Queen's head for the lot."

"Perfectly confident, my dear Mr. Goldshed."

"He'sh perfectly confident," repeated Mr. Levi in his guv'nor's ear, from over his shoulder.

"Come along then," said Mr. Goldshed, shuffling slowly out of the room, with his hands in his pockets.

"It's agreed then, gentlemen, there's no tampering with the desk?" urged Mr. Larkin entreatingly.

"Shertainly," said Mr. Goldshed, beginning to descend the stairs.

"Shertainly," repeated Mr. Levi, following him.

And the three gentlemen, in grave and friendly guise, walked away together, over the flagged court. Mr. Larkin did not half like taking the arms of these gentlemen, but the quarter of the town was not one where he was likely to meet any of either the spiritual or the terrestrial aristocracy with whom he desired specially to stand well. So he moved along conscious, not unpleasantly, of the contrast which a high-bred gentleman must always present in juxtaposition with such persons as Goldshed and Levi. They walked through the dingy corridor called Caldwell-alley, and through Ive's-lane, and along the market, already flaring and glaring with great murky jets of gas wavering in the darkening stalls, and thence by the turn to the left into the more open street, where the cab-stand is, and then having agreed to dine together at the "Three Roses" in Milk-lane in half an hour, the gentlemen parted—Messrs. Goldshed and Levi to fly in a cab to meet their lawyer at their office, and Mr. Larkin to fly westward to his hotel, to inquire for a letter which he expected. So smiling they parted; and, so soon as Mr. Larkin was quite out of sight, Mr. Levi descended from their cab, and with a few parting words which he murmured in Mr. Goldshed's ear, left him to drive away by himself, while he retraced his steps at his leisure to Rosemary-court, and finding the door of Miss Rumble's house open with Lucy Maria at it, entered and walked straight up to Mr. Dingwell's drawing-room, with a bunch of small keys in his hand, in his coat-pocket.

He had got just two steps into the room towards the little table on which the patient's desk stood, when from the other side of that piece of furniture, and the now open desk, there rose up the tall form of Mr. Jos. Larkin, of the Lodge.

The gentlemen eyed one another for a few seconds in silence, for the surprise was great. Mr. Larkin did not even set down the parcel of letters, which he had been sorting like a hand at whist, when Mr. Levi had stepped in to divert his attention.

"I thought, Mr. Larkin'sh, I might as well drop in just to give you a lift," said Levi, with an elaborate bow, a politeness, and a great smile, that rather embarrassed the good attorney.

"Certainly, Mr. Levi, I'm always happy to see you—always happy to see *any* man—I have never done anything I am ashamed of, nor shrunk from any duty, nor do I mean to do so now."

"Your hands looksh pretty full."

"Yes, sir, *pretty* tolerably full, sir," said Mr. Larkin, placing the letters on the desk; "and I may add so do *yours*, Mr. Levi; those keys, as you observe, might have given one a lift in opening this desk, had I not preferred the *other* course," said Mr. Larkin loftily, "of simply requesting Mr. Dingwell's friend, the lady at present in charge of his papers, to afford me, at her own discretion, such access to the papers possibly affecting my client, as I may consider necessary or expedient, as his legal adviser."

"You have changed your view of your duty, something; haven't you, Mr. Larkinsh?"

"No, sir, *no;* simply my action on a point of expediency. Of course, there was some weight, too, sir, in the suggestions made by a gentleman of Mr. Goldshed's experience and judgment; and I don't hesitate to say that his—his ideas had their proper weight with me. And I may say, once for all, Mr. Levi, I'll not be hectored, or lectured, or *bullied* by you, Mr. Levi," added Mr. Larkin, in a new style, feeling, perhaps, that his logical and moral vein was not quite so happy as usual.

"Don't frighten ush, Larkin, pray don't, only just give me leave to see what them letters is about," said Levi, taking his place by him; "did you put any of them in your pocket?"

"No, sir; upon my *soul*, Mr. Levi, I did no such thing," said Mr. Larkin, with a heartiness that had an effect upon the Jew. "The occasion is so serious that I hardly regret having used the expression," said Mr. Larkin, who had actually blushed at his own oath. "There was just one letter possibly worth looking at."

"That da-a-am foolish letter you wrote him to Conshtantinople?"

"I wrote him *no* foolish letter, sir. I wrote him no letter, sir, I should fear to have posted on the market cross, or read from the pulpit, Mr. Levi. I only wonder, knowing all you do of Mr. Dingwell's unfortunate temper, and reckless habits of assertion, that you should attach the smallest weight to an expression thrown out by him in one of his diabolical and—and—lamentable frenzies. As to my having abstracted a letter of his—an imputation at which I smile—I can, happily, cite evidence other than my own." He waved his hand toward Miss Rumble. "This lady has, happily, I will say, been in the room during my very brief examination of my client's half-dozen papers. Pray, madam, have I taken one of these—or, in fact, put it in my pocket?"

"No, sir, please," answered Miss Rumble, who spoke in good faith, having, with a lively remembrance of Mr. Dingwell's description of the three gentlemen who had visited the sick that day, as "three robbers," kept her eye very steadily upon the excellent Mr. Larkin, during the period of his search.

Mr. Levi would have liked to possess that letter. It would have proved possibly a useful engine in the hands of the Firm in future dealings with the adroit and high-minded Mr. Larkin. It was not to be had, however, if it really existed at all; and when some more ironies and moralities had been fired off at both sides, the gentlemen subsided into their ordinary relations, and ultimately went away together to dine on turtle, sturgeon, salmon, and I know not what meats, at the famous "Three Roses" in Milk-lane.

THE TENANTS OF MALORY.

BY J. S. LE FANU, AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," &c., &c.

CHAPTER LX.

MR. DINGWELL THINKS OF AN EXCURSION.

If Mr. Dingwell had been the most interesting, beautiful, and, I will add, wealthy of human beings, instead of being an ugly and wicked old bankrupt, Messrs. Goldshed, Levi, and Larkin could not have watched the progress of his complaint with greater trepidation, or hailed the first unequivocal symptoms of his recovery with more genuine delight. I doubt if any one of them would have experienced the same intense happiness at the restoration of wife, child, or parent.

They did not, it is true, re-assemble in Mr. Dingwell's apartments in Rosemary-court. There was not one of those gentlemen who did not set a proper value upon his own life; and they were content with the doctor's report. In due course the oracle pronounced Mr. Dingwell out of danger, but insisted on change of air.

Well, that could be managed, of course. It *must* be managed, for did not the doctor say, that without it the patient might not ultimately recover. If it could have been dispensed with, the risk would have been wisely avoided. But Mr. Dingwell's recovery depended on it, and Mr. Dingwell must be *made* to recover.

Whither should they send him? Stolen treasure or murdered body is jealously concealed by the malefactor; but not more shrinkingly than was Mr. Dingwell by those gentlemen who had him in charge. Safe enough he was while he remained in his dingy seclusion in Rosemary-court, where he lay as snugly as Asmodeus in the magician's phial, and secure against all but some such accident as the irruption of the student Don Cleophas Leandro Peres Zambullo, through the skylight. But where was to be found a rural habitation—salubrious and at the same time sufficiently secret. And if they did light upon one resembling that where the water-fiends played their pranks—

"On a wild moor, all brown and bleak,
Where broods the heath-frequenting grouse,
There stood a tenement antique—
Lord Hoppergollop's country house.

"Here silence reigned with lips of glue,
And undisturbed, maintained her law,
Save when the owl cried—'Whoo! whoo! whoo!'
Or the hoarse crow croaked—'Caw! caw! caw!'"

If I say they did find so eligible a mansion for their purpose, was it likely that their impracticable and incorrigible friend, Mr. Dingwell, would consent to spend six weeks in the "deserted mansion" as patiently as we are told Molly Dumpling did?

I think not. And when the doctor talked of country air, the patient joked peevishly about the "grove of chimneys," and "the sweet shady side of Pall-mall."

"I think, Mrs. Rumble," said he, one day, "I'm not going to die this bout at all events. I'm looking better I think—eh?"

"Looking very bad, sir, please. I can't see no improvement," said Sarah Rumble.

"Well, ma'am, you try to keep my spirits up, thank you. I'm shut up too much—that's the sole cause of it *now*. If I could creep out a bit at night."

"God forbid, sir."

"Thank you, ma'am, again. I say if I could get out a little I should soon get my strength back again; but sitting in this great padded chair I might as well be in bed; can't go out in the daytime you know—too many enemies. The owl's been moulting, ma'am—devilish sick—the moulting owl. If the old bird could flutter out a bit. I'm living like a *monk*, I was going to say—egad, I wish I was. Give me those d——

bitters; they haven't done me a bit of good—thanks."

"If you was to go to the country, sir," insinuated Miss Sarah Rumble.

"Yes, if I *was*, as you express it, I should die in a week. If air could have killed me, the curious atmosphere of this charming court would have killed me long ago. I'm not one of those air-plants, ma'am. What I want is a little fillip, ma'am—a little amusement—anything out of this prison; and I'm not going to squat on a moor, or to roost in a wood, to please a pack of fellows that don't care if I were on the treadmill, provided they could take me out whenever they want me. My health, indeed! They simply want me out of the way. My health! Their consideration for me is truly affecting. We'll not mind the bitters, yet. It's time for my claret."

He drank it, and seemed to doze for a little. Mrs. Rumble quickly settled the medicine bottles and other things that had been put out of their places, every now and then looking at the sunken face of the old man, in his death-like nap—his chin sunk on his breast, the stern carving of his massive forehead, the repulsive lines of a grim selfishness, and a certain evil shadow, made that face in its repose singularly unlovely.

Suddenly he waked.

"I say, Mrs. Rumble, I've been thinking—what about that old clergyman you mentioned—that Mr. Bartlett? I think I *will* see him—suppose he lectures me; his hard words won't break my bones, and I think he'd amuse me; so you may as well get him in, any time—I don't care when."

Sarah Rumble was only too glad to give her wicked tenant a chance, such as it was, and next day, at about one o'clock, a gentle-looking old clergyman, with thin white hair, knocked at his door, and was admitted. It was the Rev. Thomas Bartlett.

"I can't rise, sir, to receive you—you'll excuse me; but I'm still very ill," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Pray don't stir, sir," said the clergyman.

"I *can't*," said Mr. Dingwell. "Will *you* kindly sit in that chair, near the fire? What I have to say is private, and if you please we'll speak very low. My head isn't recovered yet."

"Certainly," said the old gentleman, placing himself as Dingwell wished.

"Thank you very much, sir. Now I can manage it. Isn't your name Thomas, sir—the Reverend Thomas Bartlett?" said Mr. Dingwell, looking at him shrewdly from under his white eyebrows.

"That's my name, sir."

"*My* name's Dingwell. You don't remember? I'll try to bring it to your mind. About twenty-nine years ago you were one of the curates at St. Wyther's in the Fields?"

"Yes, sir, I was," answered the clergyman, fixing his eyes in turn inquisitively on him.

"I was the witness—do you remember me now?—to the ceremony, when that unfortunate fellow, Verney, married Miss—I have a note of her name—hang it!—Rebecca, was it?—*Yes, Rebecca*—it was Rebecca Mervyn. You married Verney to Miss Mervyn, and *I* witnessed it."

"I remember very well, sir, that a gentleman did accompany Mr. Verney; and I remember the marriage extremely well, because there occurred very distressing circumstances respecting that Mr. Verney not very long after, which fixed that marriage in my mind; but having seen you once only, sir, I can't pretend to recollect your face."

"There has been some time, too, sir, since then," said Mr. Dingwell, with a cynical sneer, and a shrug. "But I think I should have recognised you; that's perhaps owing to my having a remarkably retentive memory for faces; however, it's of no great consequence here. It isn't a matter of identification at all. I only want to know, as Verney's dead, whether you can tell what has become of that poor lady, or can find any clue to her whereabouts—there was a baby—a little child—if they are still living."

"She did write to me twice, sir, within a few years after the marriage. He treated her very ill, sir," said the clergyman.

"Infamously, I fancy," said Dingwell; "and how long ago was that, sir?"

"Oh! a long time; twenty—ay, five—ay, eight-and-twenty years since," said the old gentleman.

Dingwell laughed.

His visiter stared.

"Yes, it's a good while," said Mr. Dingwell; "and looking over that gulf, sir, you may fill your glass, and sing—

'Many a lad I liked is dead,
And many a lass grown old.'

Eight-and-twenty years! 'Gad, sir, she's had time to grow gray; and to be dead and buried; and to serve a handsome period of her term in purgatory. I forgot, though; *you* don't follow me there. I was thinking of the French curé, who made part of my journey here with me."

"No, sir; Church of England, thank God; the purest faith; the most scriptural, I believe, on earth. You, sir, I assume, are of the same Church," said he.

"Well, I can't say I am, sir; nor a Catholic, nor a Quaker," said the invalid.

"I hope, sir, there's no tendency to rationalism?"

"No, sir, I thank you; to no ism whatsoever invented by any other man; Dingwellism for Dingwell; Smithism for Smith. Every man has a right to his opinion, in my poor judgment."

"And pray, sir, if neither Romanist nor Protestant, what *are* you?" inquired the clergyman, as having a right to ask.

"*Porcus de gruge epicuri*, at your service," said the sick man, with a feeble smirk.

"I had hoped, sir, it might have been for some profitable purpose you had sent for me," said the disappointed pastor.

"Well, sir, I was baptized in the Church of England, although I don't subscribe the articles; so I served in your regiment, you see, though I don't wear the uniform any longer."

"I thought, sir, you might have wished some conversation upon religious subjects."

"And haven't we had it, sir? Sorry we don't agree. I'm too old to turn out of my own way; but, though I can't learn yours, I shall be happy to teach you something of mine, if you wish it."

"I think, sir, as I have other calls to make," said the old clergyman, much offended, and rising to take his leave as he spoke, "I had better wish you a good afternoon."

"Pray, sir, stay a moment; I never knew a clergyman in such a hurry before to leave a sick man; as no man knows, according to your theory, when he's going to be converted—and how should I? The mildew of death is whitening each of us at this moment; the last golden sands are running out. D—— it, give me a chance."

This incongruous harangue was uttered so testily—even fiercely—that the good clergyman was puzzled, and began to doubt in what state his fever might have left Mr. Dingwell's brain.

"Don't you see, sir? Do sit down—a little patience won't do either of us any harm."

"Certainly sir," hesitated the clergyman, looking hard at him, "But I have not a great deal of time."

"Nor I a great deal of strength; I shan't keep you long, sir.

The Rev. Thomas Bartlett sat down again, and glanced meekly an invitation to Mr. Dingwell to begin.

"Nine-and-twenty years, sir, since you married that unlucky pair. Now, I need not say by what particular accidents—for the recollection is painful—I was in afterlife thrown into the society of that unfortunate ill-used dog, poor Arthur Verney; I knew him intimately. I was the only friend he had left, and I was with him when he died, infamously neglected by all his family. He had just got his half-yearly payment of a beggarly annuity, on which he subsisted; *he*—the rightful Viscount Verney, and the head of his family—ha, ha, ha! By Jove, sir, I can't help laughing, though I pity him. Having that little sum in his hand, said he to me 'You take charge of this for my son, if you can find him; and I rely on your friendship to look him up if ever you revisit England; this is for him; and he was baptized by the Rev. Thomas Bartlett, as my wife wrote to tell me just eight-and-twenty years ago, and he, no doubt can enable you to trace him.' That's what he said. What say you, sir?"

"Old Lady Verney placed the child in charge of the gentleman who then managed the Verney property. I heard all about it from a Mr. Wynne Williams, a Welsh lawyer. The child died when only a year old; you know *he* would have been the heir-apparent."

"Poor Arthur said *no*, sir. I asked him—a Scotch marriage, or some of those crooked wedlocks on which they found bigamies and illegitimacies. 'No,' Arthur said, 'he has no technical case, and he may be miserably poor; this is all I can do, and I charge you with it.' It was very solemn, sir. Where does that lawyer live?"

"At this moment I can't recollect, sir—some place near which the Verneys have estates."

"Cardyllian?"

"The very place, sir."

"I know it, sir; I've been there when I was a boy. And his name was *Wynne* Williams?"

"I *think* it was," said the clergyman.

"And you have nothing more to say about the poor child?" asked Mr. Dingwell.

"There *is* nothing more, I fancy, sir," said Mr. Bartlett. "Can I give you any more information?"

"Not any, sir, that I can think of at present. Many thanks, Mr. Bartlett, for your obliging call. Wait a moment for the servant."

And Mr. Dingwell, thinking fiercely, rang his hand-bell long and viciously.

"Ha! Mrs. Rumble; you'll show this gentleman out. Good-bye, sir, and many thanks."

"Good day, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a good subject, and a fertile!" muttered Mr. Dingwell, so soon as he was alone.

For the rest of that evening Mr. Dingwell seemed to find ample amusement in his own thoughts, and did not trouble Mrs. Rumble with that contemptuous and cynical banter, which she was obliged to accept, when he pleased, for conversation.

The only thing she heard him say was—"I'll go there."

Now Malory had already been proved to be a safe hiding place for a gentleman in Mr. Dingwell's uncomfortable circumstances. The air was unexceptionable, and Lord Verney was easily persuaded to permit the old man to sojourn, for a few weeks, in the steward's house, under the care of old Mrs. Mervyn's servant, aided by one provided by Messrs. Goldshed and Levi.

There were two rooms in the steward's house, which old Mrs. Mervyn never used, and some furniture removed from the Dower house adjoining, rendered them tolerably comfortable. A letter from old Lady Verney opened and explained the request, which amounted to a command, that she would permit the invalid, in whom Lord Verney took an interest, to occupy, for a fortnight or so, the spare rooms in the steward's house.

So all was made ready, and the day fixed for Mr. Dingwell's arrival.

CHAPTER LXI.

A SURPRISE.

Mr. Dingwell, already much more like himself, having made the journey by easy stages, was approaching Malory by night, in a post-chaise. Fatigue, sickness, or some other cause, perhaps, exasperated his temper specially that night.

Well made up in mufflers, his head was frequently out at the window.

"The old church, by Jove!" he muttered, with a dismal grin, as going slowly down the jolty hill. Beneath the ancient trees, the quaint little church of Llanderris, and its quiet churchyard appeared at the left of the narrow road, white in the moonlight.

"A new crop of fools, fanatics, and hypocrites come up, since *I* remember them, and the old ones gone down to enrich that patch of ground and send up their dirty juice in nettles, and thistles, and docks. 'In sure and certain hope.' Why should not they, the swine! as well as their masters, cunning, and drunken, and sneaks. I'd like to pay a fellow to cut their epitaphs. Why should I spare them a line of truth? Here I am, plain Mr. Dingwell. They don't care much about me; and when my Lord Verney went down the other day, to show them what a fool they have got for a master, amid congenial rejoicings, I don't hear that they troubled their heads with many regrets for my poor friend Arthur. Ha! There's the estuary, and Pendillion. These things don't change, my Lord Verney. Pity Lord Verney

doesn't wear as well as Pendillion. There is Ware, over the water, if we had light to see it—to think of that shabby little whey-faced fool! Here we are; these are the trees of Malory, egad!"

And with a shrug he repeated Homer's words, which say—"As are the generations of leaves, such are those of men."

Up the avenue of Malory they were driving, and Dingwell looked out with a dismal curiosity upon the lightless front of the old house.

"Cheerful reception!" he muttered. "Suppose we pick a hole in your title—a hole in your *pocket*—hey!"

Dingwell's servant was at the door of the steward's house as they drew up, and helped the snarling old invalid down.

When he got to the room the servant said—

"There's coffee, and everythink as you desired."

"I'll take breath first, if you please—coffee afterwards."

"Mrs. Mervyn hopes, sir, as how you'll parding her to-night, being so late, and not in good 'ealth herself, which she would have been hup to receive you hotherwise," said the man, delivering his message eloquently.

"Quite time enough to-morrow, and to-morrow—and to-morrow; and I don't care if our meeting creeps away, as that remarkable person, William Shakespeare, says—'in this pretty pace.' This is more comfortable, egad! than Rosemary-court. I don't care, I say, if it creeps in that pretty pace, till we are both in heaven. What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba? So help me off with these things."

Lord Verney, on whom, in his moods, Mr. Dingwell commented so fully, was dispensing his hospitalities just then, on the other side of the estuary, at his princely mansion of Ware. The party was, it is true, small—very small, in fact. Lady Wimbledon had been there, and the Hon. Caroline Oldys; but they were now visiting Cardyllian at the Verney Arms.

Mr. Jos Larkin, to his infinite content, was at Ware, and deplored the unchristian feelings displayed by Mr. Wynne Williams, whom he had by this time formally supplanted in the management of Lord Verney's country affairs, and who had exhibited "a nasty feeling," he "might say a petulance quite childish," last Sunday, when Mr. Larkin had graced Cardyllian Church with his personal devotions, and refused to vacate, in his favour, the small pew which he held as proprietor of Plasdwllyn, but which Mr. Larkin chose to think he occupied in virtue of his former position of solicitor to Lord Verney.

Cleve Verney being still in London, received one morning from his uncle the following short and astounding note, as he sat at breakfast:—

"My dear Cleve,

"The time having arrived for taking that step, which the stability of our house of Verney has long appeared to demand, all preliminaries being satisfactorily adjusted, and the young lady and Lady Wimbledon, with a very small party of their relations, as you may have observed by the public papers, at present at the Hotel of Cardyllian, nothing remains unaccomplished by way of preparation, but your presence at Ware, which I shall expect on Friday next, when you can meet Miss Caroline Oldys in those new and more defined relations which our contemplated alliance suggests. That event is arranged to take place on the Wednesday following. Mr. Larkin, who reports to me the substance of a conversation with you, and who has my instructions to apprize you fully of any details you may desire to be informed of, will see you on the morning of to-morrow, in the library at Verney House, at a quarter-past eleven o'clock. He leaves Ware by the mail train to-night. You will observe that the marriage, though not strictly private, is to be conducted without *eclat*, and has not been anywhere announced. This will explain my not inviting you to bring down any friend of yours to Ware for the occasion."

So it ends with the noble lord's signature, and a due attestation of the state of his affections towards Cleve.

With the end of his uncle's letter, an end of that young gentleman's breakfast—only just begun—came also.

Cleve did not start up and rap out an oath. On the contrary, he sat

very still, with something, almost a smile, on his pale, patient face. In a little while he folded the letter up gently, and put it in his pocket. Then he did get up and go to the window looking out upon the piece of ground at the rere of Verney House, and the sooty leaves and sparrows that beautified it. For a long time he enjoyed that view, and then took a swift walk for nearly half an hour in the streets—drowsy, formal streets in that quarter of the town, involving little risk of interruption.

His wife—what a hell was now in that word!—and why? Another man would have found in it a fountain of power and consolation. His wife, his little boy, were now in France. He thought of them both sourly enough. He was glad they were so far off. Margaret would have perceived the misery of his mind. She would have been poking questions at him, and he would neither have divulged nor in anything have consulted her. In the motive of this reserve, which harmonized with his character, may have mingled a suspicion that *his* interests and hers might not, in this crisis, have required quite the same treatment.

It was about eleven o'clock as he entered Verney House again. In a quarter of an hour more that villanous attorney, to whose vulgar machinations he attributed his present complicated wretchedness, would be with him.

Without any plan, only hating that abominable Christian, and resolved to betray neither thought nor emotion, which could lead him to suspect, ever so faintly, the truth, he at length heard him announced, as a man who has seen his death warrant hears the approach of the executioner. Mr. Larkin entered, with his well-brushed hat in his hand, his bald head shining as with a glory, a meek smile on his lips, a rat-like shrinking observation in his eyes.

"Oh! Mr. Larkin," said Mr. Cleve Verney, with a smile. "My uncle said you would look in to-day. We have often talked the matter over together, you know, my uncle and I, and I'm not sure that you can tell me very much that I don't know already. Sit down, pray."

"Thanks. I think it was chiefly to let you know what he can do for you. I need not say to you, my dear Mr. Verney, how generous Lord Verney is, and what an uncle, Mr. Verney, he has been to *you*."

Here was a little glance of the pink eyes at the ceiling, and a momentary elevation of his large hand, and a gentle, admiring shake of the bald head.

"No; of course. It is entirely as his attorney, sir, acquainted with details which he has directed you to mention to me, that he speaks of your call here. I had a letter this morning."

"Quite so. It was to mention that although he could not, of course, in prudence, under the circumstances, think of *settling* anything—which amounts, in fact, to an alienation—a step which in justice to himself, and the integrity of the family estates, he could not concede or contemplate; he yet—and he wishes it at the same time to be understood, strictly, as his present intention—means to make you an allowance of a thousand pounds a year."

"Rather a small allowance, don't you think, for a man with a seat in the House to marry on?" observed Cleve.

"Pardon me; but he does not contemplate your immediate marriage, Mr. Verney," answered Larkin.

"Rather a sudden change of plan, considering that he fixed Wednesday next, by his letter," said Cleve, with a faint sneer.

"Pardon me, again; but that referred to his own marriage—Lord Verney's contemplated marriage with the Honorable Miss Oldys."

"Oh!" said Cleve, looking steadily down on the table. "Oh! to be sure."

"That alliance will be celebrated on Wednesday, as proposed."

Mr. Larkin paused, and Cleve felt that his odious eyes were reading his countenance. Cleve could not help turning pale, but there was no other visible symptom of his dismay.

"Yes; the letter was a little confused. He has been urging me to marry, and I fancied he had made up his mind to expedite my affair; and it is rather a relief to me to be assured it is his own, for I'm in no particular hurry—quite the reverse. Is there anything more?"

"I meant to ask *you* that question, Mr. Verney. I fancied you might possibly wish to put some questions

to me. I have been commissioned, within certain limits, to give you any information you may desire." Mr. Larkin paused again.

Cleve's blood boiled. "Within certain limits! more in my uncle's confidence than I am, that vulgar, hypocritical attorney!" He fancied beside that Mr. Larkin saw what a shock the news was, and that he liked, with a mean sense of superiority, making him feel that he penetrated his affectation of indifference.

"It's very thoughtful of you; but if anything strikes me I shall talk to my uncle. There are subjects that would interest me more than those on which he would be at all likely to talk with you."

"Quite possibly," said Mr. Larkin. "And what shall I report to his lordship as the result of our conversation?"

"Simply the truth, sir."

"I don't, I fear, make myself clear. I meant to ask whether there was anything you wished me to add. You can always reckon upon me, Mr. Verney, to convey your views to Lord Verney, if there should ever happen to be anything you feel a delicacy about opening to his lordship yourself."

"Yes, I shall write to him," answered Cleve, drily.

And Cleve Verney rose, and the attorney, simpering and bowing grandly, took his departure.

CHAPTER LXII.

CLAY RECTORY BY MOONLIGHT.

As the attorney made his astounding announcement, Cleve had felt as if his brain, in vulgar parlance, *turned!* In a moment the world in which he had walked and lived from his school-days passed away, and a chasm yawned at his feet. His whole future was subverted. A man who dies in delusion, and awakes not to celestial music and the light of paradise, but to the trumpet of judgment and the sight of the abyss, will quail as Cleve did.

How he so well maintained the appearance of self-possession while Mr. Larkin remained, I can't quite tell. Pride, however, which has carried so many quivering souls, with an appearance of defiance, through the press-room to the drop, supported him.

But now that scoundrel was gone. The fury that fired him, the iron constraint that held him firm was also gone, and Cleve despaired.

Till this moment, when he was called on to part with it all, he did not suspect how entirely his ambition was the breath of his nostrils, or how mere a sham was the sort of talk to which he had often treated Margaret and others about an emigrant's life and the Arcadian liberty of the Antipodes.

The House-of-Commons life—the finest excitement on earth—the growing fame, the peerage, the premiership in the distance—the vulgar fingers of Jos Larkin had just dropped the extinguisher upon the magic lamp that had showed him these dazzling illusions, and he was left to grope and stumble in the dark among his debts, with an obscure wife on his arm, and a child to plague him also. And this was to be the end! A precarious thousand a year—dependent on the caprice of a narrow, tyrannical old man, with a young wife at his ear, and a load of debts upon Cleve's shoulders, as he walked over the quag!

It is not well to let any object, apart from heaven, get into your head and fill it. Cleve had not that vein of insanity which on occasion draws men to suicide. In the thread of his destiny that fine black strand was not spun. So blind and deep for a while was his plunge into despair, that I think had that atrabilious poison, which throws out its virus as suddenly as latent plague, and lays a *felo-de-se* to cool his heels and his head in God's prison, the grave—had a drop or two, I say, of that elixir of death been mingled in his blood, I don't think he would ever have seen another morrow.

But Cleve was not thinking of dying. He was sure—in rage, and blasphemy, and torture, it might be—but still he *was* sure to live on. Well, what was now to be done? Every

power must be tasked to prevent the ridiculous catastrophe which threatened him with ruin; neither scruple, nor remorse, nor conscience, nor compunction should stand in the way. We are not to suppose that he is about to visit the Hon. Miss Caroline Oldys with a dagger in one hand and a cup of poison in the other, nor with gunpowder to blow up his uncle and Ware, as some one did Darnley and the house of Kirk of Field. Simply his mind was filled with the one idea, that one way or another the thing *must* be stopped.

It was long before his ideas arranged themselves, and for a long time after no plan of operations which had a promise of success suggested itself. When at length he did decide, you would have said no wilder or wickeder scheme could have entered his brain.

It was a moonlight night. The scene a flat country, with a monotonous row of poplars crossing it. This long file of formal trees marks the line of a canal, fronting which at a distance of about a hundred yards stands a lonely brick house, with a few sombre elms rising near it. A light mist hung upon this expansive flat. The soil must have been unproductive, so few farmsteads were visible for miles around. Here and there pools of water glimmered coldly in the moonlight; and patches of rushes and reeds made the fields look ragged and neglected.

Here and there, too, a stunted hedge-row showed dimly along the level, otherwise unbroken, and stretching away into the haze of the horizon. It is a raw and dismal landscape, where a murder might be done, and the scream lose itself in distance unheard—where the highwayman, secure from interruption, might stop and plunder the chance wayfayer at his leisure—a landscape which a fanciful painter would flank with a distant row of gibbets.

The front of this square brick house, with a little enclosure, hardly two yards in depth, and a wooden paling in front, and with a green moss growing damply on the piers and the door-steps, and tinging the mortar between the bricks, looks out upon a narrow old road, along which just then were audible the clink and rattle of an approaching carriage and horses.

It was past one o'clock. No hospitable light shone from the windows, which on the contrary looked out black and dreary upon the vehicle and steaming horses which pulled up in front of the house.

Out got Cleve and reconnoitred.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Clay Parsonage—yes, sir," said the driver.

Cleve shook the little wooden gate, which was locked; so he climbed the paling, and knocked and rang loud and long at the hall-door.

The driver at last reported a light in an upper window.

Cleve went on knocking and ringing, and the head of the Rev. Isaac Dixie appeared high in the air, over the window-stool.

"What do you want, pray?" challenged that suave clergyman from his sanctuary.

"It's I—Cleve Verney. Why do you go to bed at such hours? I must see you for a moment."

"Dear me! my dear, valued pupil! —Who could have dreamed?—I shall be down in one moment."

"Thanks—I'll wait;" and then to the driver he said—"I shan't stay five minutes; mind, you're ready to start with me the moment I return."

Now the hall-door opened. The Rev. Isaac Dixie—for his dress was a compromise between modesty and extreme haste, and necessarily very imperfect—stood in greater part behind the hall-door; a bed-room candlestick in his fingers, smiling blandly on his "distinguished pupil," who entered without a smile, without a greeting—merely saying—

"Where shall we sit down for a minute, old Dixie?"

Holding his hand with the candle in it across, so as to keep his flowing dressing-gown together; and with much wonder and some misgivings, yet contriving his usual rosy smile, he conducted his unexpected visiter into his "study."

"I've so many apologies to offer, my very honoured and dear friend; this is so miserable, and I fear you are cold. We must get something; we must really manage something—some little refreshment."

Dixie placed the candle on the chimney-piece, and looked inquiringly on Cleve.

"There's some sherry, I know, and I *think* there's some brandy."

"There's no one up and about?" inquired Cleve.

"Not a creature," said the Rector; "no one can hear a word, and these are good thick walls."

"I've only a minute; I know you'd like to be a bishop, Dixie?"

Cleve, with his muffler and his hat still on, was addressing the future prelate, with his elbow on the chimney-piece.

"*Nolo episcopari*, of course, but we *know* you would, and there's no time now for pretty speeches. Now, listen, you shall be *that*, and you shall reach it by two steps—the two best livings in our gift. I always keep my word; and when I set my heart on a thing I bring it about, and so sure as I do any good I'll bend all my interest to that one object."

The Rev. Isaac Dixie stared hard at him, for Cleve looked strangely, and spoke as sternly as a villain demanding his purse. The Rector of Clay looked horribly perplexed. His countenance seemed to ask, "Does he mean to give me a mitre or to take my life, or is he quite right in his head?"

"You think I don't mean what I say, or that I'm talking nonsense, or that I'm mad. I'm not mad, it's no nonsense, and no man was ever more resolved to do what he says." And Cleve who was not given to swearing, did swear a fierce oath. "But all this is not for nothing; there's a condition; you must do me a service. It won't cost you much—less trouble, almost, than you've taken for me to-night, but you *must* do it."

"And may I, my dear and valued pupil, may I ask"—— began the reverend gentleman.

"No, you need not ask, for I'll tell you. It's the same sort of service you did for me in France," said Cleve.

"Ah! ha!" ejaculated the clergyman, very uneasily. "For no one but *you*, my dear and admirable pupil, could I have brought myself to take that step, and I trust that you will on reconsideration"——

"You *must* do what I say," said Cleve, looking and speaking with the same unconscious sternness, which frightened the Rector more than any amount of bluster. "I hardly suppose you want to break with me finally, and you don't quite know all the consequences of that step, I fancy."

"Break with *you?* my admirable patron! desert my dear and brilliant pupil in an emergency? *Certainly* not. Reckon upon me, my dear Mr. Verney, when*ever* you need my poor services, to the *uttermost*. To *you all* my loyalty is due, but unless you made a very special point of it, I should hesitate for any other person living, *but* yourself, to incur a second time"——

"Don't you think my dear, d—d old friend, I understand the length, and breadth, and depth, of your friendship; I know how strong it *is*, and I'll make it *stronger*. It *is* for *me*—yes, in my own case you must repeat the service, as you call it, which you once did me, in another country."

The Rev. Isaac Dixie's rosy cheeks mottled all over blue and yellow; he withdrew his hand from his dressing-gown, with an unaffected gesture of fear; and he fixed a terrified gaze upon Cleve Verney's eyes, which did not flinch, but encountered his, darkly and fixedly with a desperate resolution.

"Why you look as much frightened as if I asked you to commit a crime; you marvellous old fool, you hardly think me mad enough for *that!*"

"I hardly know, Mr. Verney, what I think," said Dixie, looking with a horrible helplessness into his face. "Good God! sir; it can't be anything *wrong?*"

"Come, come, sir; you're more than half asleep. Do you *dare* to think I'd commit myself to any man, by such an idiotic proposal? No one but a lunatic could think of *blasting* himself as you—but you *can't* suppose it. Do listen, and understand if you can; my wife, to whom you married me, is *dead*, six months ago she *died;* I tell you she's *dead.*"

"Dear me! I'm very much pained, and I will say *shocked;* the deceased lady, I should not, my dear pupil, have alluded to, of course; but need I say, I never heard of that affliction?"

"How on earth could you? You don't suppose, knowing all you do, I'd put it in the papers, among the *deaths?*"

"No; dear me, of course," said the

Rev. Isaac Dixie, hastily bringing his dressing-gown again together. "No, certainly."

"I don't think that sort of publication would answer you or me. You forget it is two years ago and more —a *good deal* more. *I* don't though, and whatever *you* may, *I* don't want my uncle to know anything about it."

"But, you know, I only meant, you hadn't told me; my dear Mr. Verney, my honoured pupil, you will see—don't you perceive how much is involved? but *this—couldn't* you put this upon some one else? Do--*do* think."

"No, in *no* one's power, but *yours*, Dixie;" and Cleve took his hand, looking in his face, and wrung it so hard that the reverend gentleman almost winced under the pressure, of administering which I dare say Cleve was quite unconscious. "No one but *you*."

"The poor—the respected lady—being deceased, of course you'll give me a note to that effect under your hand; you'll have no objection, in this case, to my taking out a special licence?"

"Special devil! are you mad? Why anyone could do it with that. No, it's just because it is a little *irregular*, nothing more, and exacts implicit mutual confidence that I have chosen you for it."

Dixie looked as if the compliment was not an unmixed pleasure.

"I still think, that—that having performed the other, there is some awkwardness, and the penalties are awful," said he with increasing uneasiness; "and it does strike me, that if my dear Mr. Verney could place his hand upon some other humble friend, in this particular case, the advantages would be obvious."

"Come, Dixie," said Cleve, "I'm *going*; you must say yes or no, and so decide whether you have seen the last of me. I can't spend the night giving you my reasons, but they are conclusive. If you act like a man of sense, it's the last service I shall ever require at your hands, and I'll reward you *splendidly*; if you don't, I not only cease to be your friend, but I become your *enemy*. I can strike when I like it—you know *that*; and upon my soul I'll smash you. I shall see my uncle to-morrow morning at Ware, and I'll tell him distinctly the entire of that French transaction."

"But—but pray, my dear Mr. Verney, do say, *did* I refuse—*do* I *object?* you may command me, of course. I have incurred, I may say, a risk for you already, a risk in *form*."

"Exactly, *in form*; and you don't increase it by this kindness, and you secure my eternal gratitude. Now you speak like a man of sense. You must be in Cardyllian to-morrow evening. It is possible I may ask *nothing* of you; if I do, the utmost is a technical irregularity, and secrecy, which we are both equally interested in observing. You shall stay a week in Cardyllian, mind, and I, of course, frank you there and back, and while you remain—it's my business. It has a political aspect, as I shall explain to you by-and-by, and so soon as I shall have brought my uncle round, and can avow it, it will lead the way rapidly to *your* fortune. Shall I see you in Cardyllian to-morrow evening?"

"Agreed, sir!—agreed, my dear Mr. Verney. I shall be there, my dear and valued pupil—*yes*."

"Go to the Verney Arms; I shall probably be looking out for you there; at all events I shall see you before night."

Verney looked at his watch, and repeated "I shall see you to-morrow;" and without taking leave, or hearing, as it seemed, the Rev. Isaac Dixie's farewell compliments and benedictions, he walked out in gloomy haste, as if the conference was not closed, but only suspended, by the approaching parenthesis of a night and a day.

From the hall-table the obsequious divine took the key of the little gate, to which, in slippers and dressing gown, he stepped blandly forth, and having let out his despotic pupil, and waved his adieu, as the chaise drove away, he returned, and locked up his premises and house, with a great load at his heart.

CHAPTER LXIII.

AN ALARM.

CLEVE reached the station, eight miles away from the dismal swamp I have described, in time to catch the mail train. From Llwynan he did not go direct to Ware, but drove instead to Cardyllian, and put up at the Verney Arms early next morning.

By ten o'clock he was seen sauntering about the streets, talking with old friends, and popping into the shops and listening to the gossip of the town. Cleve had a sort of friendliness that answered all electioneering purposes perfectly, and that was the measure of its value.

Who should he light upon in Castle-street but Tom Sedley! They must have arrived by the same train at Llwynan. The sight of Tom jarred intensely upon Cleve Verney's nerves. There was something so strange in his looks and manner that Sedley thought him ill. He stopped for a while to talk with him at the corner of Church-street, but seemed so obviously disposed to escape from him, that Sedley did not press his society, but acquiesced with some disgust and wonder in their new relations.

Tom Sedley had been with Wynne Williams about poor Vane Etherage's affairs. Honest Wynne Williams was in no mood to flatter Lord Verney, the management of whose affairs he had, he said, "resigned." The fact was that he had been, little by little, so uncomfortably superseded in his functions by our good friend Jos Larkin, and the fashion of Lord Verney's countenance was so manifestly changed, that honest Wynne Williams felt that he might as well do a proud thing, and resign, as wait a little longer for the inevitable humiliation of dismissal.

"I'm afraid my friend the admiral is in bad hands; worse hands than Larkin's he could hardly have fallen into. I could tell you things of that fellow, if we had time—of course strictly between ourselves, you know—that would open your eyes. And as to his lordship—well, I suppose most people know something of Lord Verney. I owe him nothing, you know; it's all ended between us, and I wash my hands of him and his concerns. You may talk to him, if you like; but you'll find you might as well argue with the tide in the estuary there. I'd be devilish glad if I could be of any use; but you see how it is; and to tell you the truth, I'm afraid it must come to a regular smash, unless Lord Verney drops that nasty litigation. There are some charges, you know, upon the property already; and with that litigation hanging over it, I don't see how he's to get money to pay those calls. It's a bad business, I'm afraid, and an awful pity. Poor old fellow! —a little bit rough, but devilish good-hearted."

Tom Sedley went up to Hazelden. The Etherage girls knew he was coming, and were watching for him at the top of the steep walk.

"I've been talking, as I said I would, to Wynne Williams this morning," he said, after greetings and inquiries made and answered, "and he had not anything important to advise; but he has promised to think over the whole matter."

"And Wynne Williams is *known* to be *the* cleverest lawyer *in the world*," exclaimed Miss Charity, exulting. "I was afraid, on account of his having been so lately Lord Verney's adviser, that he would not have been willing to consult with you. And *will* he use his influence, which must be very great, with Lord Verney?"

"He has none; and he thinks it would be quite useless my talking to him."

"Oh! Is it possible? Well, if he said *that*, I *never* heard *such* nonsense in the course of my life. I think old Lord Verney was one of the *very nicest* men I *ever* spoke to in the course of my life; and I'm certain it is all that horrid Mr. Larkin, and a great mistake; for Lord Verney is quite a gentleman, and would not do anything so *despicable* as to worry and injure papa by this horrid business, if only you would make him understand it; and I *do* think, Thomas Sedley, you *might* take that trouble for papa."

"I'll go over to Ware, and try to see Lord Verney, if you think my doing so can be of the least use," said

Tom, who knew the vanity of arguing with Miss Charity.

"Oh, *do*," said pretty Agnes, and that entreaty was, of course, a command; so without going up to see old Etherage, who was very much broken and ill, his daughters said; and hoping possibly to have some cheering news on his return, Tom Sedley took his leave for the present, and from the pier of Cardyllian crossed in a boat to Ware.

On the spacious steps of that palatial mansion, as Mr. Larkin used to term it, stood Lord Verney, looking grandly seaward, with compressed eyes, like a near-sighted gentleman as he was.

"Oh! is she all right?" said Lord Verney.

"I—I don't know, Lord Verney," replied Tom Sedley. "I came to"—

"Oh—aw—Mr.—Mr.—how d'ye do, sir?" said Lord Verney, with marked frigidity, not this time giving him the accustomed finger.

"I came, Lord Verney, hoping you might possibly give me five minutes, and very few words, about that unfortunate business of poor Mr. Vane Etherage."

"I'm unfortunately just going out in a boat—about it; and I can't just now afford time, Mr.—a—Mr."—

"*Sedley* is my name," suggested Sedley, who knew that Lord Verney remembered him perfectly.

"Sedley—Mr. Sedley; yes. As I mentioned, I'm going in a boat. I'm sorry I can't possibly oblige you; and it is very natural you, who are so intimate, I believe, with Mr. Etherage, should take that side of the question—about it; but *I've* no reason to call those proceedings unfortunate; and—and I don't anticipate—and, in fact, people usually look after their own concerns—about it."

"I'm sure, Lord Verney, if you knew how utterly ruinous, how really *deplorable*, the consequences of pursuing this thing—I mean the lawsuit against him—may be—I am *sure*—you would stop it all."

Honest Tom spoke in the belief that in the hesitation that had marked the close of the noble lord's remarks there was a faltering of purpose, whereas there was simply a failure of ideas.

"I can't help your forming opinions, sir, though I have not invited their expression upon my concerns and—and affairs. If you have anything to communicate about those proceedings, you had better see Mr. Larkin, my attorney; he's the proper person. Mr. Etherage has taken a line in the county to wound and injure me, as, of course, he has a perfect right to do; he has taken that line, and I don't see any reason why I should not have what I'm entitled to. There's the principle of government by party, you're aware; and we're not to ask favours of those we seek to wound and injure—about it; and that's my view, and idea, and fixed opinion. I must wish you good morning, Mr. Sedley. I'm going down to my boat, and I decline distinctly any conversation upon the subject of my law business; I decline it *distinctly*, Mr. Sedley—about it," repeated the peer peremptorily; and as he looked a good deal incensed, Tom Sedley wisely concluded it was time to retire; and so his embassage came to an end.

Lord Verney crossed the estuary in his yacht, consulting his watch from time to time, and reconnoitring the green and pier of Cardyllian through his telescope with considerable interest. A little group was assembled near the stair, among whose figures he saw Lady Wimbledon. "Why is not Caroline there?" he kept asking himself, and all the time searching that little platform for the absent idol of his heart.

Let us deal mercifully with this antiquated romance; and if Miss Caroline Oldys forebore to say, "Go up, thou baldhead," let us also spare the amorous incongruity. Does any young man love with the self-abandonment of an old one? Is any romance so romantic as the romance of an old man? When Sancho looked over his shoulder, and saw his master in his shirt, cutting capers and tumbling head-over-heels, and tearing his hair in his love-madness, that wise governor and man of proverbs forgot the grotesqueness of the exhibition in his awe of that vehement adoration. So let us. When does this noble frenzy exhibit itself in such maudlin transports, and with a self-sacrifice so idolatrously suicidal, as in the old? Seeing, then, that the spirit is so prodigiously willing, let us bear with the spectacle of their infirmities, and when one of

these sighing, magnanimous, wrinkled Philanders goes by, let us not hiss, but rather say kindly, "*Vive la bagatelle!*" or, as we say in Ireland, "More power!"

He was disappointed. Miss Caroline Oldys had a very bad headache, Lady Wimbledon said, and was in her room, in care of her maid, *so* miserable at losing the charming sail to Malory.

Well, the lover was sorely disappointed, as we have said; but there was nothing for it but submission, and to comfort himself with the assurances of Lady Wimbledon that Caroline's headaches never lasted long, and that she was always better for a long time when they were over. This latter piece of information seemed to puzzle Lord Verney.

"Miss Oldys is always better after an attack than before it," said Cleve, interpreting for his uncle.

"Why, of *course*. That's what Lady Wimbledon means, as *I* understand it," said Lord Verney, a little impatiently. "It's very sad; you must tell me all about it; but we may hope to find her, you say, quite recovered when we return?"

Cleve was not of the party to Malory. He returned to the Verney Arms. He went up to Lady Wimbledon's drawing-room with a book he had promised to lend her, and found Miss Caroline Oldys.

Yes, she was better. He was very earnest and tender in his solicitudes. He was looking ill, and was very melancholy.

Two hours after her maid came in to know whether she "pleased to want anything?" and she would have sworn that Miss Caroline had been crying. Mr. Cleve had got up from beside her, and was looking out of the window.

A little later in the day, old Lady Calthorpe, a cousin of Lady Wimbledon's, very feeble and fussy, and babbling in a querulous treble, was pushed out in her Bath-chair, Cleve and Miss Caroline Oldys accompanying, to the old castle of Cardyllian.

On the step of the door of the Verney Arms, as they emerged, whom should they meet, descending from the fly that had borne him from Llwynan, but the Rev. Isaac Dixie. That sleek and rosy gentleman, with flat feet, and large hands, and fascinating smile, was well pleased to join the party, and march blandly beside the chair of the Viscountess, invigorating the fainting spirit of that great lady by the balm of his sympathy and the sunshine of his smile.

So into the castle they went, across the nearly obliterated moat, where once a drawbridge hung, now mantled with greenest grass, under the grim arches, where once the clanging portcullis rose and fell, and into the base court, and so under other arches into the inner court, surrounded by old ivy-mantled walls.

In this seclusion the old Lady Calthorpe stopped her chair to enjoy the sweet air and sunshine, and the agreeable conversation of the divine, and Cleve offered to guide Miss Caroline Oldys through the ruins, an exploration in which she seemed highly interested.

Cleve spoke low and eloquently, but I don't think it was about the architecture. Time passed rapidly, and at last Miss Oldys whispered—

"We've been too long away from Lady Calthorpe. I must go back. She'll think I have deserted her."

So they emerged from the roofless chambers and dim corridors, and Cleve wished from the bottom of his heart that some good or evil angel would put off his uncle's nuptials for another week, and all would be well —*well!*

Yes—what was "well," if one goes to moral ideals for a standard? We must run risks—we must set one side of the book against the other. What is the purpose and the justification of all morality but happiness? The course which involves least misery is alternatively the moral course. And take the best act that ever you did, and place it in that dreadful solvent, the light of God's eye, and how much of its motive will stand the test? Yes—another week, and all will be well; and has not a fertile mind like his resource for any future complication, as for this, that may arise?

Captain Shrapnell was not sorry to meet this distinguished party as they emerged, and drew up on the grass at the side, and raised his hat with a reverential smile, as the old lady wheeled by, and throwing a deferential concern suddenly into his countenance, he walked a few paces beside Cleve, while he said—

"You've heard, of course, about your uncle, Lord Verney?"

"No?" answered Cleve, on chance.

"*No?*—Oh!—Why it's half an hour ago. I hope it's nothing serious; but his groom drove down from Malory for the doctor here. Something wrong with his head--suddenly, I understand, and old Lyster took his box with him, and a bottle of leeches --that looks serious, eh?—along with him."

Shrapnell spoke low, and shook his head.

"I--I did not hear a word of it. I've been in the castle with old Lady Calthorpe. I—I'm very much surprised."

There was something odd, shrewd old Shrapnell fancied in the expression of Cleve's eye, which for a moment met his. But Cleve looked pale and excited, as he said a word in a very low tone to Miss Oldys, and walked across the street, accompanied by Shrapnell, to the doctor's shop.

"Oh!" said Cleve, hastily stepping in, and accosting a lean, pale youth, with lank, black hair, who paused in the process of braying a prescription in a mortar as he approached. "My uncle's not well, I hear—Lord Verney —at Malory?"

The young man glanced at Captain Shrapnell.

"The doctor told me not to mention, sir; but if *you'd* come into the back-room"——

"I'll be with you in a moment," said Cleve Verney to Shrapnell, at the same time stepping into the sanctum, and the glass-door being shut, he asked, "What *is* it?"

"The doctor thought it must be apoplexy, sir," murmured the young man, gazing with wide open eyes, very solemnly, in Cleve's face.

"So I fancied," and Cleve paused, a little stunned; "and the doctor's there, at Malory, *now?*"

"Yes, sir; he'll be there a quarter of an hour or more by this time," answered the young man.

Again Cleve paused.

"It was not fatal—he was still living?" he asked very low.

"Yes, sir—sure."

Cleve, forgetting any form of valediction, passed into the shop.

"I must drive down to Malory," he said; and calling one of those pony carriages which ply in Cardyllian, he drove away, with a wave of his hand to the Captain, who was sorely puzzled to read the true meaning of that handsome mysterious face.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A NEW LIGHT.

It was all over Cardyllian by this time that the Viscount was very ill —dying perhaps—possibly dead. Under the transparent green shadow of the tall old trees, down the narrow road to Malory, which he had so often passed in other moods, more passionate, hardly perhaps less selfish, than his present, was Cleve now driving, with brain and heart troubled and busy—"walking, as before, in a vain shadow, and disquieting himself in vain." The daisies looked up innocently as the eyes of children, into his darkened gaze. Had fate after all taken pity on him, and was here by one clip of the inexorable shears a deliverance from the hell of his complication?

As Cleve entered the gate of Malory he saw the party from Cardyllian leaving in the yacht on their return. Lady Wimbledon, it turned out, had remained behind in charge of Lord Verney. On reaching the house, Cleve learned that Lord Verney was *alive*—was better in fact.

Combining Lady Wimbledon's and the doctor's narratives, what Cleve learned amounted to this: Lord Verney, who affected a mysterious urgency and haste in his correspondence, had given orders that his letters should follow him to Malory that day. One of these letters, with a black seal and black-bordered envelope, proved to be a communication of considerable interest. It was addressed to him by the clergyman who had charge of poor old Lady Verney's conscience, and announced that his care was ended, and the Dowager Lady, Lord Verney's mother, was dead.

As the doctor who had attended her was gone, and no one but servants in the house, he had felt it a duty to

write to Lord Verney to apprize him of the melancholy event.

The melancholy event was no great shock to Lord Verney, her mature son of sixty-four, who had sometimes wondered dimly whether she would live as long as the old Countess of Desmond, and go on drawing her jointure for fifty years after his own demise. He had been a good son; he had nothing to reproach himself with. She was about ninety years of age; the estate was relieved of £1,500 per annum. She had been a religious woman too, and was, no doubt, happy. On the whole the affliction was quite supportable.

But no affliction ever came at a more awkward time. Here was his marriage on the eve of accomplishment—a secret so well kept up to yesterday that no one on earth, he fancied, but half a dozen people, knew that any such thing was dreamed of. Lord Verney, like other tragedians in this theatre of ours, was, perhaps, a little more nervous than he seemed, and did not like laughter in the wrong place. He did not want to be talked over, or, as he said, "any jokes or things about it." And therefore he wished the event to take mankind unawares, as the Flood did. But this morning, with a nice calculation as to time, he had posted four letters, bound, like Antonio's argosies, to different remote parts of the world—one to Pau, another to Lisbon, a third to Florence, and a fourth for Geneva, to friends who were likely to spread the news in all directions—which he cared nothing about, if only the event came off at the appointed time. With the genius of a diplomatist, he had planned his remaining despatches, not very many, so as to reach their less distant destinations at the latest hour, previous to that of his union. But the others were actually on their way, and he supposed a month or more must now pass before it could take place with any decorum, and, in the meantime, all the world would be enjoying their laugh over his interesting situation.

Lord Verney was very much moved when he read this sad letter; he was pathetic and peevish, much moved, and irritated, and shed some tears. He withdrew to write a note to the clergyman who had announced the catastrophe, and was followed by Lady Wimbledon, who held herself privileged, and to her he poured forth his "ideas and feelings" about his "poor dear mother who was gone, about it;" and suddenly he was seized with a giddiness so violent that if a chair had not been behind him he must have fallen on the ground.

It was something like a fit; Lady Wimbledon was terrified; he looked so ghastly, and answered nothing, only sighed laboriously, and moved his white lips. In her distraction she threw up the window, and screamed for the servants; and away went Lord Verney's open carriage, as we have seen, to Cardyllian, for the doctor.

By the time that Cleve arrived, the attack had declared itself gout—fixed, by a mustard bath "nicely" in the foot, leaving, however, its "leven mark" upon the head where it had flickered in an angrily inflamed eye.

Here was another vexation. It might be over in a week, the doctor said; it might last a month. But for the present it was quite out of the question moving him. They must contrive, and make him as comfortable as they could. But at Malory he must be contented to remain for the present.

He saw Cleve for a few minutes.

"It's very unfortunate—your poor dear grandmother—and this gout; but we must bow to the will of Providence; we have every consolation in her case. She's, no doubt, gone to heaven, about it; but it's indescribably untoward, the whole thing; you apprehend me—the marriage—you know—and things; we must pray to heaven to grant us patience under these cross-grained, unintelligible misfortunes that are always persecuting some people, and never come in the way of others, and *I* beg you'll represent to poor Caroline how it is. I'm not even to write for a day or two; and you must talk to her, Cleve, and try to keep her up, for I do believe she does like her old man, and does not wish to see the poor old fellow worse than he is; and, Cleve, I appreciate your attention and affection in coming so promptly;" and Lord Verney put out his thin hand and pressed Cleve's. "You're very kind, Cleve, and if they allow me I'll see you to-morrow, and you'll

tell me what's in the papers, for they won't let me read; and there will be this funeral, you know—about it—your poor dear grandmother; she'll, of course—she'll be buried; you'll have to see to that, you know; and Larkin, you know—he'll save you trouble, and—and—hey! ha, ha—ho! Very pleasant! Good gracious what torture! Ha!—Oh, dear! Well, I think I've made everything pretty clear, and you'll tell Caroline—it's only flying gout—about it—and—and things. So I must bid you good-by, dear Cleve, and God bless you."

So Cleve did see Caroline Oldys at the Verney Arms, and talked a great deal with her, in a low tone, while old Lady Wimbledon dozed in her chair, and, no doubt, it was all about his uncle's "flying gout."

That night our friend Wynne Williams was sitting in his snuggery, a little bit of fire was in the grate, the air being sharp, his tea-things on the table, and the cozy fellow actually reading a novel, with his slippered feet on the fender.

It was half-past nine o'clock, a rather rakish hour in Cardyllian, when the absorbed attorney was aroused by a tap at his door.

I think I have already mentioned that in that town of the golden age, hall-doors stand open, in evidence of "ancient faith that knows no guile," long after dark.

"Come in," said Wynne Williams; and to his amazement who should enter, not with the conventional smile of greeting, but pale, dark, and wo-begone, but the tall figure of Mrs. Rebecca Mervyn.

Honest Wynne Williams never troubled himself about ghosts, but he had read of spectral illusions, and old Mrs. Mervyn unconsciously encouraged a fancy that the thing he greatly feared had come upon him, and that he was about to become a victim to that sort of hallucination. She stood just a step within the door, looking at him, and he, with his novel on his knee, stared at her as fixedly.

"She's dead," said the old lady.

"*Who?*" exclaimed the attorney.

"The Dowager Lady Verney," she continued, rather than answered.

"I was so much astonished, ma'am, to see you here; you haven't been down in the town these twelve years I think. I could scarce believe my eyes. Won't you come in, ma'am? Pray do." The attorney by this time was on his legs, and doing the honours, much relieved, and he placed a chair for her. "If it's any business, ma'am, I'll be most happy, or any time you like."

"Yes, she's dead," said she again.

"Oh, come in, ma'am—*do*—so is Queen Anne," said the attorney, laughing kindly. "I heard *that* early to-day; we *all* heard it, and we're sorry, of course. Sit down, ma'am. But then she was not very far from a hundred, and we're all mortal. Can I do anything for you, ma'am?"

"She was good to me—a proud woman—hard, they used to say; but she was good to me—yes, sir—and so she's gone, at last. She was frightened at them; there was something in them—my poor head—you know—*I* couldn't see it, and I did not care, for the little child was gone; it was only two months old, and she was ninety years; it's a long time, and now she's in her shroud, poor thing, and I may speak to you."

"Do, ma'am—pray; but it's growing late, and hadn't we better come to the point a bit?"

She was sitting in the chair he had placed for her, and she had something under her cloak, a thick book it might be, which she held close in her arms. She placed it on the table, and it turned out to be a small tin box with a padlock.

"Papers, ma'am?" he inquired.

"Will you read them, sir, and see what ought to be done? There's the key."

"Certainly, ma'am;" and having unlocked it, he disclosed two little sheaves of papers, neatly folded and endorsed.

The attorney turned these over rapidly, merely reading at first the little note of its contents written upon each. "By Jove!" he exclaimed; he looked very serious now, with a frown, and the corners of his mouth drawn down, like a man who witnesses something horrible.

"And, ma'am, how long have you had these?"

"Since Mr. Sedley died."

"I know; that's more than twenty years, I think; did you show them to anyone?"

"Only to the poor old lady who's gone."

"Ay, I see."

There was a paper endorsed "Statement of facts," and this the attorney was now reading.

"Now, ma'am, do you wish to place these papers in my hands, that I may act upon them as the interests of those who are nearest to you may require?"

She looked at him with a perplexed gaze, and said, "*Yes*, sir, certainly."

"Very well, ma'am; then I must go up to town at once. It's a very serious affair, ma'am, and I'll do my duty by you."

"Can you understand them, sir?"

"N—*no*—that is, I must see counsel in London; I'll be back again in a day or two. Leave it all to me, ma'am, and the moment I know anything for certain, you shall know all about it."

The old woman asked the question as one speaks in their sleep, without hearing the answer. Her finger was to her lip, and she was looking down with a knitted brow.

"Ay, she was proud—I *promised*—proud—she was—very high—it will be in Penruthyn—she told me she would be buried there—Dowager Lady Verney—I wish, sir, it had been I."

She drew her cloak about her and left the room, and he accompanied her with the candle to the hall-door, and saw her hurry up the street.

Now and then a passenger looked at the tall cloaked figure gliding swiftly by, but no one recognised her.

The attorney was gaping after her in deep abstraction, and when she was out of sight he repeated, with a resolute wag of his head—

"I *will* do my duty by you—and a serious affair, upon *my soul!* A *very* serious affair it is."

And so he closed the door, and returned to his sitting-room in deep thought, and very strange excitement, and continued reading those papers till one o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER LXV.

MR. DINGWELL AND MRS. MERVYN CONVERSE.

Cleve was assiduous in consoling Miss Caroline Oldys, a duty specially imposed upon him by the voluntary absence of Lady Wimbledon, who spent four or five hours every day at Malory, with an equally charitable consideration for the spirits of Lord Verney, who sat complaining in pain and darkness.

Every day he saw more or less of the Rev. Isaac Dixie, but never alluded to his midnight interview with him at Clay Rectory. Only once, a little abruptly, he had said to him, as they walked together on the green,

"I say, you must manage your duty for two Sundays more—you *must* stay here for the funeral—that will be on Tuesday week."

Cleve said no more; but he looked at him with a fixed meaning in his eye, with which the clergyman somehow could not parley.

At the post-office, to which Miss Oldys had begged his escort, a letter awaited him. His address was traced in the delicate and peculiar hand of that beautiful being who in those very scenes had once filled every hour of his life with dreams, and doubts, and hopes; and now how did he feel as those slender characters met his eye? Shall I say, as the murderer feels when some relic of his buried crime is accidentally turned up before his eyes—chilled with a pain that reaches on to doomsday—with a tremor of madness—with an insufferable disgust?

Smiling, he put it with his other letters in his pocket, and felt as if every eye looked on him with suspicion—with dislike, and as if little voices in the air were whispering, "It is from his wife—from his wife—from his wife."

Tom Sedley was almost by his side, and had just got his letters—filling him, too, with dismay—posted not ten minutes before from Malory, and smiting his last hope to the centre.

"Look at it, Cleve," he said, half an hour later. "I thought all these things might have softened him—his own illness and his mother's death; and the Etherages—by Jove, I think he'll ruin them; the poor old man is going to leave Hazelden in two or three weeks, and—and he's *utterly* ruined I think, and all by that d—d lawsuit, that Larkin knows perfectly well Lord Verney can never succeed

in; but in the meantime it will be the ruin of that nice family, that were so happy there; and look—here it is—my own letter returned—so insulting—like a beggar's petition; and this note—not even signed by him.

"Lord Verney is indisposed; he has already expressed his fixed opinion upon the subject referred to in Mr. Sedley's statement, which he returns; he declines discussing it, and refers Mr. Sedley again to his solicitor."

So, disconsolate Sedley, having opened his griefs to Cleve, went on to Hazelden, where he was only too sure to meet with a thoroughly sympathetic audience.

A week passed, and more. And now came the day of old Lady Verney's funeral. It was a long procession—tenants on horseback, tenants on foot—the carriages of all the gentlemen round about.

On its way to Penruthyn Priory the procession passed by the road, ascending the steep by the little church of Llanderris, and full in view, through a vista in the trees, of the upper windows of the steward's house.

Our friend Mr. Dingwell, whose journey had cost him a cold, got his clothes on for this occasion, and was in the window, with a field-glass, which had amused him on the road from London.

He had called up Mrs. Mervyn's servant girl to help him to the names of such people as she might recognise.

As the hearse, with its grove of sable plumes, passed up the steep road, he was grave for a few minutes; and he said—

"That was a good woman. Well for *you*, ma'am, if you have ever one-twentieth part of her virtues. She did not know how to make her virtues pleasant, though; she liked to have people afraid of her; and if you have people afraid of you, my dear, the odds are they'll hate you. We can't have everything—virtue and softness, fear and love—in this queer world. An excellent—severe—most ladylike woman. What are they stopping for now? Oh! There they go again. The only ungenteel thing she ever did is what she has begun to do now—to rot; but she'll do it *alone*, in the *dark*, you see; and there *is* a right and a wrong, and she did some good in her day."

The end of his queer homily he spoke in a tone a little gloomy, and he followed the hearse awhile with his glass.

In two or three minutes more the girl thought she heard him sob; and looking up, with a shock, perceived that his face was gleaming with a sinister laugh.

"What a precious coxcomb that fellow Cleve, is—chief mourner, egad—and he does it pretty well. 'My inky cloak, good mother.' He looks so sorry, I almost believe he's thinking of his uncle's wedding. 'Thrift, Horatio, thrift!' I say, Miss—I always forget your name. My dear young lady, be so good, will you, as to say I feel better to-day, and should be very happy to see Mrs. Mervyn, if she could give me ten minutes?"

So she ran down upon her errand, and he drew back from the window, suffering the curtain to fall back as before, darkening the room; and Mr. Dingwell sat himself down, with his back to the little light that entered, drawing his robe-de-chambre about him, and resting his chin on his hand.

"Come in, ma'am," said Mr. Dingwell, in answer to a tap at the door, and Mrs. Mervyn entered. She looked in the direction of the speaker, but could see only a shadowy outline, the room was so dark.

"Pray, madam, sit down on the chair I've set for you by the table. I'm at last well enough to see you. You'll have questions to put to me. I'll be happy to tell you all I know. I was with poor Arthur Verney, as you are aware, when he died."

"I have but one hope now, sir—to see him hereafter. Oh, sir! *did* he think of his unhappy soul—of heaven?"

"Of the other place he did think, ma'am. I've heard him wish evil people, such as clumsy servants and his brother here, in it; but I suppose you mean to ask was he devout—eh?"

"Yes, sir; it has been my prayer, day and night, in my long solitude. What prayers, what prayers, what terrible prayers, God only knows."

"Your prayers were heard, ma'am; he was a saint."

"Thank God!"

"The most punctual, edifying, self-tormenting saint I ever had the pleasure of knowing in any quarter of the globe," said Mr. Dingwell.

"*Oh!* thank God."

"His reputation for sanctity in Constantinople was immense, and at both sides of the Bosphorus he was the admiration of the old women and the wonder of the little boys, and an excellent Dervish, a friend of his, who was obliged to leave after having been bastinadoed for a petty larceny, told me he has seen even the town dogs and the asses hold down their heads, upon my life, as he passed by, to receive his blessing!"

"Superstition—but still it shows, sir"——

"To be sure it does, ma'am."

"It shows that his sufferings—my darling Arthur—had made a real change."

"Oh! a *complete* change, ma'am. Egad, a *very* complete change, *indeed!*"

"When he left this, sir, he was—oh! my darling—thoughtless, volatile"——

"An infidel and a scamp—eh? So he told me, ma'am."

"And I have prayed that his sufferings might be sanctified to him," she continued, "and that he might be converted, even though I should never see him more."

"So he was, ma'am; *I* can vouch for that," said Mr. Dingwell.

Again poor Mrs. Mervyn broke into a rapture of thanksgiving.

"Vastly lucky you've been, ma'am; *all* your prayers about him, egad, seem to have been granted. Pity you did not pray for something he might have enjoyed more. But all's for the best—eh?"

"All things work together for good—all for good," said the old lady, looking upward, with her hands clasped.

"And you're as happy at his conversion, ma'am, as the Ulema who received him into the faith of Mahomet—*happier*, I really think. Lucky dog! what interest he inspires, what joy he diffuses, even now, in Mahomet's paradise, I dare say. It's worth while being a sinner for the sake of the conversion, ma'am."

"Sir—sir, I can't understand," gasped the old lady after a pause.

"No difficulty, ma'am, none in the world."

"For God's sake, *don't;* I think I'm going *mad*," cried the poor woman.

"Mad, my good lady! Not a bit. What's the matter? Is it Mahomet? You're not afraid of *him?*"

"Oh, sir, for the *Lord's* sake, tell me what you mean," implored she wildly.

"I mean *that*, to be sure; what I *say*," he replied. "I mean that the gentleman complied with the custom of the country—don't you see?—and submitted to Kismet. It was his fate, ma'am; it's the invariable condition; and they'd have handed him over to his Christian compatriots to murder, according to Frank law, otherwise. So, ma'am, he shaved his head, put on a turban—they wore turbans then—and, with his Koran under his arm, walked into a mosque, and said his say about Allah and the rest, and has been safe ever since."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the poor old lady, trembling in a great agony.

"Ho! *no*, ma'am; 'twasn't much," said he briskly.

"All, all; the last hope!" cried she wildly.

"Don't run away with it, pray. It's a very easy and gentlemanlike faith, Mahometanism—except in the matter of wine; and even that you can have, under the rose, like other things here, ma'am, that aren't quite orthodox; eh?" said Mr. Dingwell.

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur!" moaned the poor lady distractedly, wringing her hands.

"Suppose, ma'am, we pray it may turn out to have been the right way. Very desirable, since Arthur died in it," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Oh, sir, oh! I couldn't have believed it. Oh, sir, this shock—this frightful shock!"

"Courage, madam! Console yourself. Let us hope he didn't believe this any more than the other," said Mr. Dingwell.

Mrs. Mervyn leaned her cheek on her thin clasped hands, and was rocking herself to and fro in her misery.

"I was with him, you know, in his last moments," said Mr. Dingwell, shrugging sympathetically, and crossing his leg. "It's always interesting, those last moments—eh?—and exquisitely affecting, even—*particularly* if it isn't very clear *where* the fellow's going."

A tremulous moan escaped the old lady.

"And he called for some wine. That's comforting, and has a flavour of Christianity, eh? A *relapse*, don't you think, very nearly?—at so unconvivial a moment. It must have been *principle*; eh? Let us hope."

The old lady's moans and sighs were her answers.

"And now that I think on it, he must have died a Christian," said Mr. Dingwell, briskly.

The old lady looked up, and listened breathlessly.

"Because, after we thought he was speechless, there was one of those what-d'ye-call-'ems—begging dervish fellows—came into the room, and kept saying one of their long yarns about the prophet Mahomet, and my dying friend made me a sign; so I put my ear to his lips, and he said distinctly, 'He be d—d!'—I beg your pardon; but last words are always precious."

Here came a pause.

Mr. Dingwell was quite bewildering this trembling old lady.

"And the day before," resumed Mr. Dingwell, "poor Arthur said, 'They'll bury me here under a turban; but I should like a mural tablet in old Penruthyn church. They'd be ashamed of my name, I think; so they can put on it the date of my decease, and the simple inscription, 'Check-mate.' But whether he meant to himself or his creditors I'm not able to say."

Mrs. Mervyn groaned.

"It's very interesting. And he had a message for you, ma'am. He called you by a name of endearment. He made me stoop, lest I should miss a word, and he said, 'Tell my little linnet,' said he"——

But here Mr. Dingwell was interrupted. A wild cry, a wild laugh, and—"Oh, Arthur, it's *you!*"

He felt, as he would have said, "oddly" for a moment—a sudden flood of remembrance, of youth. The worn form of that old outcast, who had not felt the touch of human kindness for nearly thirty years, was clasped in the strain of an inextinguishable and angelic love—in the thin arms of one likewise faded and old, and near the long sleep in which the heart is fluttered and pained no more.

There was a pause, a faint laugh, a kind of sigh, and he said—

"So you've found me out."

"Darling, darling! you're not changed?"

"Change!" he answered, in a low tone. "There's a change, little linnet, from summer to winter; where the flowers were the snow is. Draw the curtain, and let us look on one another."

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE GREEK MERCHANT SEES LORD VERNEY.

Our friend, Wynne Williams, made a much longer stay than he had expected in London. From him, too, Tom Sedley received about this time a mysterious summons to town, so urgent and so solemn that he felt there was something extraordinary in it; and on consultation with the Etherage girls, those competent advisers settled that he should at once obey it.

Tom wrote to Agnes on the evening of his arrival—

"I have been for an hour with Wynne Williams; you have no notion what a good fellow he is, and what a wonderfully clever fellow. There is something *very* good in prospect for me, but not yet certain, and I am bound not to tell a human being but *you*. I will, of course, the moment I know it for certain. It may turn out nothing at all; but we are working very hard all the same."

In the meantime, down at Malory, things were taking a course of which the good people of Cardyllian had not a suspicion.

With a little flush over his grim brown face, with a little jaunty swagger, and a slight screwing of his lips, altogether as if he had sipped a little too much brandy and water—though he had nothing of the kind that day—giggling and chuckling over short sentences; with a very determined knitting of his eyebrows, and something in his eyes unusually sinister, which a sense of danger gives to a wicked face, Mr. Dingwell walked down the clumsy stairs of the steward's house, and stood within the hatch.

There he meditated for a few moments, with compressed lips, and a wandering sweep of his eyes along the stone urns and rose bushes that stood in front of the dwarf wall, which is backed by the solemn old trees of Malory.

"In for a penny, in for a pound."

And he muttered a Turkish sentence, I suppose equivalent; and thus fortified by the wisdom of nations, he stepped out upon the broad gravel walk, looked about him for a second or two, as if recalling recollections, in a sardonic mood, and then walked round the corner to the front of the house, and up the steps, and pulled at the door bell; the knocker had been removed in tenderness to Lord Verney's irritable nerves.

Two of his tall footmen in powder and livery were there, conveyed into this exile from Ware; for calls of inquiry were made here, and a glimpse of state was needed to overawe the bumpkins.

"His lordship was better; was sitting in the drawing-room; might possibly see the gentleman; and who should he say, please?"

"Say, Mr. Dingwell, the great Greek merchant, who has a most important communication to make."

His lordship would see Mr. Dingwell. Mr. Dingwell's name was called to a second footman, who opened a door, and announced him.

Lady Wimbledon, who had been sitting at the window, reading aloud to Lord Verney at a little chink of light, abandoned her pamphlet, and rustled out by another door, as the Greek merchant entered.

Dim at best, and very unequal was the light. The gout had touched his lordship's right eyeball, which was still a little inflamed, and the doctor insisted on darkness.

There was something diabolically waggish in Mr. Dingwell's face, if the noble lord could only have seen it distinctly, as he entered the room. He was full of fun; he was enjoying a coming joke, with perhaps a little spice of danger in it, and could hardly repress a giggle.

The Viscount requested Mr. Dingwell to take a chair, and that gentleman waited till the servant had closed the door, and then thanked Lord Verney in a strange nasal tone, quite unlike Mr. Dingwell's usual voice.

"I come here, Lord Verney, with an important communication to make. I could have made it to some of the people about you—and you have able professional people—or to your nephew; but it is a pleasure, Lord Verney, to speak instead to the cleverest man in England."

The noble lord bowed a little affably, although he might have questioned Mr. Dingwell's right to pay him compliments in his own house; but Mr. Dingwell's fiddlestick had touched the right string, and the noble instrument made music accordingly. Mr. Dingwell, in the dark, looked very much amused.

"I can hardly style myself *that*, Mr. Dingwell."

"I speak of *business*, Lord Verney; and I adopt the language of the world in saying the cleverest man in England."

"I'm happy to say my physician allows me to listen to reading, and to talk a little, and there can be no objection to a little business either," said Lord Verney, passing by the compliment this time, but, on the whole, good-humouredly disposed toward Mr. Dingwell.

"I've two or three things to mention, Lord Verney; and the first is money."

Lord Verney coughed drily. He was suddenly recalled to a consciousness of Mr. Dingwell's character.

"Money, my lord. The name makes you cough, as smoke does a man with an asthma. I've found it all my life as hard to keep, as you do to part with. If I had but possessed Lord Verney's instincts and abilities, I should have been at this moment one of the wealthiest men in England."

Mr. Dingwell rose as he said this, and bowed towards Lord Verney.

"I said I should name it first; but as your lordship coughs, we had, perhaps, best discuss it last. Or, indeed, if it makes your lordship cough very much, perhaps we had better postpone it, or leave it entirely to your lordship's discretion — as I wouldn't for the world send this little attack into your chest."

Lord Verney thought Mr. Dingwell less unreasonable, but also more flighty, than he had supposed.

"You are quite at liberty, sir, to treat your subjects in what order you please. I wish you to understand

that I have no objection to hear you; and—and you may proceed."

"The next is a question on which I presume we shall find ourselves in perfect accord. I had the honour, as you are very well aware, of an intimate acquaintance with your late brother, the Honorable Arthur Verney, and beyond measure I admired his talents, which were second in brilliancy only to your own. I admired even his *principles*—but I see they make you cough also. They were, it is true, mephitic, sulphurous, such as might well take your breath, or that of any other moral man, quite away; but they had what I call the Verney stamp upon them; they were perfectly consistent, and quite harmonious. His, my lord, was the intense and unflinching rascality, if you permit me the phrase, of a man of genius, and I honoured it. Now, my lord, his adventures were curious, as you are aware, and I have them at my fingers' ends—his crimes, his escape, and, above all, his life in Constantinople—ha, ha, ha! It would make your hair stand on end. And to think he should have been *your brother!* Upon my *soul!* Though, as I said, the genius—the *genius*, Lord Verney—the inspiration was there. In *that* he *was* your brother."

"I'm aware, sir, that he had talent, Mr. Dingwell, and could speak—about it. At Oxford he was considered the most promising young man of his time—almost."

"Yes, except *you;* but you were two years later."

"Yes, exactly. I was precisely two years later—about it."

"Yes, my lord, you were always about it; so he told me. No matter what it was—a book, or a boot-jack, or a bottle of port, you were always about it. It was a way you had, he said—about it."

"I wasn't aware that anyone remarked any such thing—about it," said Lord Verney, very loftily.

It dawned dimly upon him that Mr. Dingwell, who was a very irregular person, was possibly intoxicated. But Mr. Dingwell was speaking, though in a very nasal, odd voice, yet with a clear and sharp articulation, and in a cool way, not the least like a man in that sort of incapacity. Lord Verney concluded, therefore, that Mr. Dingwell was either a remarkably impertinent person, or most insupportably deficient in the commonest tact. I think he would have risen, even at the inconvenience of suddenly disturbing his flannelled foot, and intimated that he did not feel quite well enough to continue the conversation, had he not known something of Mr. Dingwell's dangerous temper, and equally dangerous knowledge and opportunities; for had they not subsidized Mr. Dingwell, in the most unguarded manner, and on the most monstrous scale, pending the investigation and proof before the Lords? "It was inevitable," Mr. Larkin said, "but also a little awkward; although *they* knew that the man had sworn nothing but truth." *Very* awkward, *Lord Verney* thought, and therefore he endured Mr. Dingwell.

But the "great Greek merchant," as, I suppose half jocularly, he termed himself, not only seemed odious at this moment, by reason of his impertinence, but also formidable to Lord Verney, who having waked from his dream that Dingwell would fly beyond the Golden Horn when once his evidence was given, and the coronet well fixed on the brows of the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, found himself still haunted by this vampire bat, which threatened to fasten on his breast, and drain him.

The question of money he would leave "to his discretion." But what did his impertinence mean? Was it not minatory? And to what exorbitant sums in a choice of evils might not "discretion" point?

"This d—d Mr. Dingwell," thought Lord Verney, "will play the devil with my gout. I wish he was at the bottom of the Bosphorus."

"Yes. And your brother, Arthur—there were points in which he differed from you. Unless I'm misinformed, he was a first-rate cricketer, the crack bat of their team, and you were *nothing;* he was one of the best Grecians in the university, and you were plucked."

"I—I don't exactly see the drift of your rather inaccurate and extremely offensive observations, Mr. Dingwell," said Lord Verney, wincing and flushing in the dark.

"Offensive? Good heaven! But I'm talking to a Verney, to a man of genius; and I say, how the devil could I tell that *truth* could offend,

either. With this reflection I forgive *myself*, and I go on to say what will interest you."

Lord Verney, who had recovered his presence of mind, here nodded, to intimate that he was ready to hear him.

"Well there were a few other points, but I need not mention them, in which you differed. You were both alike in this—each was a genius—you were an opaque and obscure genius, he a brilliant one; but each being a genius there must have been a sympathy, notwithstanding his being a publican and you a—not exactly a Pharisee, but a paragon of prudence."

"I really, Mr. Dingwell, must request—you see I'm far from well, about it—that you'll be so good as a little to abridge your remarks, and I don't want to hear—you can easily, I hope, understand—my poor brother talked of in any but such terms as a brother should listen to."

"That arises, Lord Verney, from your not having had the advantage of his society for so very many years. Now, I knew him intimately, and I can undertake to say he did not care twopence what any one on earth thought of him, and it rather amused him painting infernal caricatures of himself, as a fiend or a monkey, and he often made me laugh by the hour—ha, ha, ha! he amused himself with revealed religion, and with everything sacred, sometimes even with *you*—ha, ha, ha!—he *had* certainly a wonderful sense of the ridiculous."

"May I repeat my request, if it does not appear to you *very* unreasonable?" again interrupted Lord Verney; "and may I entreat to know what it is you wish me to understand—about it, in as few words as you can, sir?"

"Certainly, Lord Verney; it is just this. As I have got materials, perfectly authentic, from my deceased friend, both about himself—horribly racy, you may suppose—ha, ha, ha!—about your granduncle Pendel—you've heard of him, of course—about your aunt Deborah, poor thing, who sold mutton pies in Chester. I was thinking — suppose I write a memoir—Arthur alone deserves it; you pay the expenses; I take the profits, and I throw you in the copyright for a few thousand more, and call it, 'Snuffed-out lights of the Peerage,' or something of the kind? I think something is due to Arthur—don't you?"

"I think you can hardly be serious, Mr.—Mr. ——"

"Perfectly serious, upon my soul, my lord. Could anything be more curious? Eccentricity's the soul of genius, and you're proud of your genius, I *hope*."

"What strikes me, Mr. Dingwell, amounts, in short, to something like this. My poor brother, he has been unfortunate, about it, and — and *worse*, and he has done things, and I ask myself *why* there should be an effort to obtrude him, and I answer myself, there's no reason, about it, and therefore I vote to have everything as it is, and I shall neither contribute my countenance, about it, nor money to any such undertaking, or—or—undertaking."

"Then my book comes to the ground, egad."

Lord Verney simply raised his head with a little sniff, as if he were smelling at a snuff-box.

"Well, Arthur must have something, you know."

"My brother, the Honorable Arthur Kiffyn Verney, is past receiving anything at my hands, and I don't think he probably looked for anything, about it, at any time from *yours*."

"Well, but it's just the time for what I'm thinking of. You wouldn't give him a tombstone in his lifetime, I suppose, though you are a genius. Now, I happen to know he wished a tombstone. *You*'d like a tombstone, though not now—time enough in a year or two when you're fermenting in your lead case."

"I'm not thinking of tombstones at present, sir, and it appears to me that you are giving yourself a very unusual latitude—about it."

"I don't mean in the mausoleum at Ware. Of course that's a place where people who have led a decorous life putrefy together. I meant at the small church of Penruthyn, where the scamps await judgment."

"I—a—don't see that such a step is properly for the consideration of any persons—about it—outside the members of the Verney family, or more properly, of any but the representatives of that family," said Lord Verney, loftily, "and you'll excuse

my not admitting, or—or, in fact, admitting any right in anyone else."

"He wished it immensely."

"I can't understand why, sir."

"Nor I; but I suppose you all get them—all ticketed—eh? And I'd write the epitaph, only putting in essentials, though, egad! in such a life it would be as long as a newspaper."

"I've already expressed my opinion, and—and things, and I have nothing to add."

"Then the tombstone comes to the ground also?"

"Anything *more*, sir?"

"But, my lord, he showed an immense consideration for you."

"I don't exactly recollect *how*."

"By *dying* you've got hold of everything, don't you see, and you grudge him a tablet in the little church of Penruthyn, by gad! I told your nephew he wished it, and I tell you he wished it; it's not stinginess, it's your mean pride."

"You seem, Mr. Dingwell, to fancy that there's no limit to the impertinence I'll submit to."

"I'm sure there's none almost—you better not ring the bell—you better think twice—he gave me that message, and he also left me a mallet—quite a toy—but a single knock of it would bring Verney House, or Ware, or this place, about your ears."

The man was speaking in quite another voice now, and in the most awful tones Lord Verney had ever heard in his life, and to his alarmed and sickly eyes it seemed as if the dusky figure of his visiter were dilating in the dark like an evoked Genii.

"I—I think—about it—it's quite unaccountable—all this." Lord Verney was looking at the stranger as he spoke, and groping with his left hand for the old-fashioned bell-rope which used to hang near him in the library in Verney House, forgetting that there was no bell of any sort within his reach at that moment.

"I'm not going to take poor dear Arthur's mallet out of my pocket, for the least tap of it would make all England ring and *roar*, sir. No, I'll make no noise; you and I, sir, *tête-a-tête*. I'll have no go-between; no Larkin, no Levi, no Cleve; you and I'll settle it alone. Your brother was a great Grecian, they used to call him Οδυσσευς—Ulysses. Do you remember? I said I was the great Greek merchant? We have made an exchange together. You must pay. What shall I call myself, for Dingwell isn't my name. I'll take a new one—Το μεν πρωτον Ουτιν ἑαυτον επικαλει—επειδανδε διεφευγε, και εξω ην βελους, Οδυσσυν ονομαζεσθαι εφη. In English—at first he called himself Outis—*Nobody;* but so soon as he had escaped, and was out of the javelin's reach, he said that he was named Odusseus—*Ulysses*, and here he is. This is the return of Ulysses."

There had been a sudden change in Mr. Dingwell's Yankee intonation. The nasal tones were heard no more. He approached the window, and said with a laugh, pulling the shutter more open—

"Why, Kiffyn, you fool, don't you know me?"

There was a silence.

"My great God! my great God of heaven!" came from the white lips of Lord Verney.

"Yes; God's over all," said Arthur Verney, with a strange confusion, between a sneer and something more genuine.

There was a long pause.

"Ha, ha, ha! don't make a scene! Not such a muff?" said Dingwell.

Lord Verney was staring at him with a face white and peaked, as that of a corpse, and whispering still—"My God! my great God!" so that Dingwell, as I still call him, began to grow uneasy.

"Come; don't you make mountains of molehills. What the devil's all this fuss about? Here, drink a little of this." He poured out some water, and Lord Verney did sip a little, and then gulped down a good deal, and then he looked at Arthur again fixedly, and groaned.

"That's right—never mind. I'll not hurt you. Don't fancy I mean to disturb you. I *can't*, you know, if I wished it *ever* so much. I daren't *show*—I *know* it. Don't suppose I want to *bully* you; the idea's *impracticable*. I looked in merely to tell you, in a friendly way, who I am. You must do something handsome for me, you know. Devil's in it if a fellow can't get a share of his own money, and, as I said before, we'll have no go-betweens, no Jews or attorneys—d—n them all—but settle it between ourselves like brothers. Sip a little more water."

"Arthur, Arthur, *I* say, yes; good God, I feel I shall have a good deal to say; but—my head, and things—I'm a little perplexed still, and I must have a glass of wine, about it, and I can't do it now; no, I can't."

"I don't live far away, you know; and I'll look in to-morrow—we're not in a hurry."

"It was a strange idea, Arthur. Good Lord, have mercy on me."

"Not a bad one; eh?"

"The coronet — about it? I'm placed in a dreadful position, but you shan't be compromised, Arthur. Tell them I'm not very well, and some *wine*, I think—a little chill."

"And to-morrow I can look in again, quietly," said the Greek merchant, "or whenever you like, and I shan't disclose our little confidence."

"It's going — everything, everything; I shall see it by-and-by," said Lord Verney, helplessly.

And thus the interview ended, and Mr. Dingwell in the hall gave the proper alarm about Lord Verney.

CHAPTER LXVII.

A BREAK-DOWN.

About an hour after, a message came down from Malory for the doctor.

"How is his lordship?" asked the doctor eagerly.

"No, it isn't *him*, sure; it is the old *lady* is taken very bad."

"Lady Wimbledon?"

"No, sure. Her ladyship's not there. Old Mrs. Mervyn."

"Oh!" said the doctor, tranquillized. "Old Rebecca Mervyn, is it? And what may be the matter with the poor old lady?"

"Fainting like; one fainting into another, sure; and her breath almost gone. She's very bad—as pale as a sheet."

"Is she talking at all?"

"No, not a word. Sittin' back in her chair, sure."

"Does she know you, or mind what you say to her?"

"Well, *no*. She's a-holdin' that old white-headed man's hand that's been so long bad there, and a-lookin' at him; but I don't think she hears nor sees nothin' myself."

"Apoplexy, or the heart, more likely," ruminated the doctor. "Will you call one of those pony things for me?"

And while the pony-carriage was coming to the door, he got a few phials together and his coat on, being in a hurry; for he was to play a rubber of billiards at the club for five shillings, at seven o'clock.

In an hour's time after the interview with Arthur Verney, Lord Verney had wonderfully collected his wits. His effects in that department, it is true, were not very much, and perhaps the more easily brought together. He wrote two short letters—marvellously short for him—and sent down to the Verney Arms to request the attendance of Mr. Larkin.

Lord Verney was calm; he was even gentle; spoke, in his dry way, little, and in a low tone. He had the window-shutter opened quite, and the curtains drawn back, and seemed to have forgotten his invalided state, and everything but the revolution which in a moment had overtaken and engulfed him—to which great anguish with a dry resignation he submitted.

Over the chimney was a little oval portrait of his father, the late Lord Verney, taken when they wore the hair long, falling back upon their shoulders. A pretty portrait, refined, handsome, insolent. How dulled it was by time and neglect—how criss-crossed over with little cracks; the evening sun admitted now set it all aglow.

"A very good portrait. How has it been overlooked so long? It must be preserved; it shall go to Verney House. To Verney House? I forgot."

Mr. Jos Larkin, in obedience to this sudden summons, was speedily with Lord Verney. With this call a misgiving came. The attorney smiled blandly, and talked in his meekest and happiest tones; but people who knew his face would have remarked that sinister contraction of the eye to which in moments of danger or treachery he was subject, and which, in spite of his soft tones and childlike smile, betrayed the fear or the fraud of that vigilant and dangerous Christian.

When he entered the room, and saw Lord Verney's face pale and stern, he had no longer a doubt,

Lord Verney requested Mr. Larkin to sit down, and prepare for something that would surprise him.

He then proceeded to tell Mr. Larkin that the supposed Mr. Dingwell was, in fact, his brother, the Hon. Arthur Verney, and that, therefore, he was not Lord Verney, but only as before, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney.

Mr. Larkin saw that there was an up-hill game and a heavy task before him. It was certain now, and awful. This conceited and foolish old nobleman, and that devil incarnate, his brother, were to be managed, and those Jew people, who might grow impracticable; and doors were to be muffled, and voices lowered, and a stupendous secret kept. Still he did not despair—if people would only be true to themselves.

When Lord Verney came to that part of his brief narrative where, taking some credit dismally to himself for his penetration, he stated that "notwithstanding that the room was dark and his voice disguised, I recognised him; and you may conceive, Mr. Larkin, that when I made the discovery I was a good deal disturbed about it."

Mr. Larkin threw up his eyes and hands—

"*What* a world it is, my dear Lord Verney! for so I persist in styling you still, for this will prove virtually no interruption."

At the close of his sentence the attorney lowered his voice earnestly.

"I don't follow you, sir, about it," replies Lord Verney, disconsolately; "for a man who has had an illness, he looks wonderfully well, and in good spirits and things, and as likely to live as I am, about it."

"My remarks, my lord, were directed rather to what I may term the animus—the design—of this, shall I call it, *demonstration*, my lord, on the part of your lordship's brother."

"Yes, of course, the animus, about it. But it strikes me he's as likely to outlive me as not."

"My lord, may I venture, in confidence and with great respect, to submit, that your lordship was hardly judicious in affording him a personal interview?"

"Why, I should hope my personal direction of that conversation, and—and things, has been such as I should wish," said the peer, very loftily.

"My lord, I have failed to make myself clear. I never questioned the consummate ability with which, no doubt, your lordship's part in that conversation was sustained. What I meant to convey is, that considering the immense distance socially between you, the habitual and undeviating eminence of your lordship's position, and the melancholy circle in which it has been your brother's lot to move, your meeting him face to face for the purpose of a personal discussion of your relations, may lead him to the absurd conclusion that your lordship is, in fact, afraid of him."

"That, sir, would be a very impertinent conclusion."

"Quite so, my lord, and render him proportionably impracticable. Now, I'll undertake to bring him to reason." The attorney was speaking very low and sternly, with contracted eyes and a darkened face. "He has been married to the lady who lives in the house adjoining, under the name of Mrs. Mervyn, and to my certain knowledge inquiries have been set in motion to ascertain whether there has not been issue of that marriage."

"You may set your mind perfectly at rest with regard to that marriage, Mr. Larkin; the whole thing was thoroughly sifted—and things—my father undertook it, the late Lord Verney, about it; and so it went on, and was quite examined, and it turned out the poor woman had been miserably deceived by a mock ceremony, and this mock thing was the whole *thing*, and there's nothing more; the evidence was very deplorable, and—and quite satisfactory."

"Oh! that's a great weight off my mind," said Larkin, trying to smile, and looking very much disappointed, "a great weight, my lord."

"I knew it would—yes—*yes*," acquiesced Lord Verney.

"And simplifies our dealings with the other side; for if there had been a good marriage, and concealed issue male of that marriage, they would have used that circumstance to *extort money*."

"Well, I don't see how they could, though; for if there had been a child, about it—he'd have been heir-apparent, don't you see? to the title."

"Oh!—a—yes—*certainly!* that's very true, my lord; but then there's *none*, so *that*'s at rest."

"I've just heard," interposed Lord Verney, "I may observe, that the poor old lady, Mrs. Mervyn, is suddenly and dangerously ill."

"Oh! *is* she?" said Mr. Larkin very uneasily, for she was, if not his queen, at least a very valuable pawn upon his chess-board.

"Yes; the doctor thinks she's actually dying, poor old soul!"

"What a world! What is life? What is man?" murmured the attorney with a devout feeling of the profoundest vexation. "It was for this most melancholy character," he continued; "you'll pardon me, my lord, for so designating a relative of your lordship's. The Honorable Arthur Verney, who has so *fraudulently*, I will say, presented himself again as a living claimant—your lordship is aware, of course—I shall be going up to town possibly by the mail train to-night—that the law, if it were permitted to act, would remove that obstacle under the old sentence of the Court."

"Good God! sir; you can't possibly mean that I should have my brother caught and executed?" exclaimed Lord Verney, turning quite white.

"Quite the reverse, my lord. I'm—I'm unspeakably shocked that I should have so misconveyed myself," said Larkin, his tall bald head tinged to its top with an ingenuous blush. "Oh, no, my lord, I understand the Verney feeling too well, thank God, to suppose anything, I will say, so *entirely* objectionable. I said, my lord, if it were *permitted*, that is, allowed by simple non-*interference*—your lordship sees—and it is precisely because non-interference must bring about that catastrophe; for I must not conceal from your lordship the fact that there is a great deal of unpleasant talk in the town of Cardyllian already—that I purpose running up to town to-night. There is a Jew firm, your lordship is aware, who have a very heavy judgment against him, and the persons of that persuasion are so interlaced, as I may say, in matters of business, that I should apprehend a communication to them from Goldshed and Levi, who, by-the-bye, to my certain knowledge—*what* a world it is!—have a person here actually watching Mr. Dingwell, or in other words, the unhappy but Honorable Arthur Verney, in *their* interest. (This was in effect true, but the name of this person which he did not care to disclose, was Josiah Larkin.) If I were on the spot, I think I know a way effectually to stop all action of that sort."

"You think they'd arrest him, about it?" said Lord Verney.

"Certainly, my lord."

"It is very much to be deprecated," said Lord Verney.

"And, my lord, if you will agree to place the matter quite in my hands, and peremptorily to decline on all future occasions, conceding a personal interview, I'll stake my professional character, I effect a satisfactory compromise."

"I—I don't know—I don't *see* a compromise—there's nothing that I see, to *settle*," said Lord Verney.

"*Every* thing, my lord. Pardon me—your lordship mentioned that, in point of fact, you are no longer Lord Verney; that being so—technically, of course—measures must be taken—in short, a—a quiet *arrangement* with your lordship's brother, to prevent any disturbance, and I undertake to effect it, my lord; the nature of which will be to prevent the return of the title to abeyance, and of the estates to the management of the trustees, whose claim for mesne *rates* and the liquidation of the mortgage, I need not tell your lordship, would be ruinous to you."

"Why, sir—Mr. Larkin—I can hardly believe, sir—you can't mean, or think it possible, sir, that I should lend myself to a deception, and—and sit in the House of Peers by a *fraud*, sir! I'd much rather *die* in the debtors' prison, about it; and I consider myself dishonoured by having involuntarily heard such an—an idea."

Poor, pompous, foolish Lord Verney stood up, so dignified and stern in the light of his honest horror, that Mr. Larkin, who despised him utterly, quailed before a phenomenon he could not understand.

Nothing confounded our friend Larkin, as a religious man, so much as discovering, after he had a little unmasked, that his client would not follow, and left him, as once or twice had happened, alone with his dead villanous suggestion, to account for it how he could.

"Oh dear!—*surely*, my lord, your lordship did not *imagine*," said Mr.

Larkin, doing his best, "I was—I, in fact—I *supposed* a *case*. I only went the length of saying that I think—and with *sorrow* I think it—that your lordship's brother has in view an *adjustment* of his claim, and meant to *extract*, I fear, a sum of *money* when he disclosed himself, and conferred with your lordship. I meant merely, of course, that as he thought this I would *let* him think it, and allow him to disclose his plans, with a view, of course, to deal with that information—first, of *course*, with a view to your lordship's *honour*, and next your lordship's safety; but if your lordship did not see your way *clearly* to it"——

"No, I don't see—I think it most objectionable—about it. I know all that concerns me; and I have written to two official persons—one, I may say, the Minister himself—apprizing them of the actual position of the title, and asking some information as to how I should proceed in order to divest myself of it and the estates."

"Just what I should have expected from your lordship's exquisite sense of honour," said Mr. Larkin, with a deferential bow, and a countenance black as thunder. "Might I suggest, for the safety of your lordship's unhappy brother, that the matter should be kept strictly quiet—just for a day or two, until I shall have made arrangements for his—may I term it—escape?"

"Certainly," said Lord Verney, looking away a little. "Yes—*that* must, of course, be arranged; and—and this marriage—I shall leave that decision entirely in the hands of the young lady." Lord Verney was a little agitated. "And I think, Mr. Larkin, I have said everything at present. Good evening."

As Mr. Larkin traversed the hall of Malory, scratching the top of his bald head with one finger, in profound and black rumination, I am afraid his thoughts and feelings amounted to a great deal of cursing and swearing.

"Sweet evening," he observed suddenly to the surprised servant who opened the door for him. He was now standing at the threshold, with his hands expanded as if he expected rain, and smiling villanously upward toward the stars.

"Sweet evening," he repeated, and then biting his lip and looking down for a while on the gravel, he descended and walked round the corner to the steward's house.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

MR. LARKIN'S TWO MOVES.

THE hatch of the steward's house stood open, and Mr. Larkin entered. There was a girl's voice crying in the room next the hall, and he opened the door.

The little girl was sobbing with her apron to her eyes, and hearing the noise she lowered it and looked at the door, when the lank form of the bald attorney and his sinister face peering in met her eyes, and arrested her lamentation with a new emotion.

"It's only I—Mr. Larkin," said he. He liked announcing himself wherever he went. "I want to know how Mrs. Mervyn is now."

"Gone dead, sir—about a quarter of an hour ago;" and the child's lamentation recommenced.

"Ha! very sad. The doctor here?"

"He's gone, sir."

"And you're *certain* she's dead?"

"Yes, sure, sir," and she sobbed on.

"Stop that," he said, sternly, "just a moment—thanks. I want to see Mr. Dingwell, the old gentleman who has been staying here—where is he?"

"In the drawing-room, sir, please," said the child, a good deal frightened. And to the drawing-room he mounted.

Light was streaming from a door a little open, and a fragrance also of a peculiar tobacco, which he recognised as that of Mr. Dingwell's chibouque. There was a sound of feet upon the floor of the room above, which Mr. Larkin's ear received as those of persons employed in arranging the dead body.

I would be perhaps wronging Mr. Dingwell, as I still call him, to say that he smoked like a man perfectly indifferent. On the contrary, his countenance looked lowering and furious—so much so that Mr. Larkin removed his hat, a courtesy which he had intended studiously to omit.

"Oh! Mr. Dingwell," said he, "I need not introduce myself."

"No, I prefer your withdrawing yourself and shutting the door," said Dingwell.

"Yes, in a moment, sir. I merely wish to mention that Lord Verney—I mean your brother, sir—has fully apprized me of the conversation with which you thought it prudent to favour him."

"You'd rather have been the medium yourself, I fancy. Something to be made of such a situation? Hey! but you *shan't.*"

"I don't know what you mean, sir, by something to be made. If I chose to mention your name and abode in the city, sir, you'd not enjoy the power of insulting others long."

"Pooh, sir! I've got your letter, and my brother's secret. I know my strength. I'm steering the fire-ship that will blow you all up, if I please; and you talk of flinging a squib at me, you blockhead! I tell you, sir, you'll make nothing of me; and now you may as well withdraw. There are two things in this house you don't like, though you'll have enough of them one day; there's death up stairs, sir, and something very like the devil here."

Mr. Larkin thought he saw signs of an approaching access of the Dingwell mania, so he made his most dignified bow, and at the door remarked, "I take my leave, sir, and when next we meet I trust I may find you in a very different state of mind, and one more favourable to business."

He had meditated a less covert sneer and menace, but modified his speech prudently as he uttered it; but there was still quite enough that was sinister in his face, as he closed the door, to strike Mr. Dingwell's suspicion.

"Only I've got that fellow in my pocket, I'd say he was bent on mischief; but he's in my pocket; and suppose he did, no great matter, after all—only dying. I'm not gathering up my strength; no—I shall never be the same man again—and life so insipid—and that poor old doll up stairs. So many things going on under the stars, all ending *so!*"

Yes—so many things. There was Cleve, chief mourner to-day, chatting now wonderfully gaily, with a troubled heart, and a kind of growing terror to that foolish victim who no more suspected him than he did the resurrection of his uncle Arthur, smoking his chibouque only a mile away.

There, too, far away, is a pale, beautiful young mother, sitting on the bedside of her sleeping boy, weeping silently, as she looks on his happy face, and—*thinks.*

Mr. Dingwell, arrayed in travelling costume, suddenly appeared before Lord Verney again.

"I'm not going to plague you—only this. I've an idea I shall lose my life if I don't go to London to-night, and I must catch the mail train. Tell your people to put the horses to your brougham, and drop me at Llwynan."

Lord Verney chose to let his brother judge for himself in this matter, being only too glad to get rid of him.

Shrieking through tunnels, thundering through lonely valleys, gliding over wide, misty plains, spread abroad like lakes, the mail train bore Arthur Verney, and also—each unconscious of the other's vicinity—Mr. Jos Larkin, toward London.

Mr. Larkin had planned a checkmate in two moves. He had been brooding over it in his mufflers, sometimes with his eyes shut, sometimes with his eyes open—all night, in the corner of his carriage. When he stepped out in the morning, with his despatch-box in his hand, whom should he meet in the cold gray light upon the platform, full front, but Mr. Dingwell. He was awfully startled.

Dingwell had seen him, too; Larkin had felt, as it were, his quick glance touch him, and he was sure that Dingwell had observed his momentary but significant change of countenance. He, therefore, walked up to him, touched him on the arm, and said, with a smile—

"I thought, sir, I recognised you. I trust you have an attendant? Can I do anything for you? Cold, this morning. Hadn't you better draw your muffler up a little about your face?" There was a significance about this last suggestion which Mr. Dingwell could not mistake, and he complied. "Running down again to Malory in a few days, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Dingwell.

"So shall I, and if quite convenient to you I should wish, sir, to talk

that little matter over much more carefully, and—can I call a cab for you? I should look in upon you to-day only I must be at Brighton, not to return till to-morrow, and very busy then, too."

They parted. Dingwell did not like it.

"He's at mischief. I've thought of *every* thing, and I can't see *any* thing that would answer *his* game. I don't like his face."

Dingwell felt very oddly. It was all like a dream; an unaccountable horror overcame him. He sent out for a medicine that day, which the apothecary refused to give to Mrs. Rumble. But he wrote an explanatory note alleging that he was liable to fits, and so got back just a little, at which he pooh'd and psha'd, and wrote to some other apothecaries, and got together what he wanted, and told Mrs. Rumble he was better.

He had his dinner as usual in his snuggery in Rosemary-court, and sent two letters to the post by Mrs. Rumble. That to Lord Verney contained Larkin's *one* unguarded letter inviting him to visit England, and with all the caution compatible with being intelligible, but still not enough—suggesting the audacious game which had been so successfully played. A brief and pointed commentary, in Mr. Dingwell's handwriting, accompanied this.

The other enclosed to Wynne Williams, to whose countenance he had taken a fancy; the certificate of his marriage to Rebecca Mervyn, and a reference to the Rev. Thomas Bartlett, and charged him to make use of it to quiet any unfavourable rumours about that poor lady, who was the only human being he believed who had ever cared much about him.

When Wynne Williams opened this letter he lifted up his hands in wonder.

"A miracle, by heaven!" he exclaimed. "The most providential and marvellous interposition—the *only* thing we wanted!"

"Perhaps I was wrong to break with that villain, Larkin," brooded Mr. Dingwell. "We must make it up when we meet. I don't like it. When he saw me this morning his face looked like the hangman's."

It was now evening, and having made a very advantageous bargain with the Hebrew gentleman who had that heavy judgment against the late Hon. Arthur Verney—an outlaw, &c.—Mr. Larkin played his first move, and amid the screams of Mrs. Rumble, old Dingwell was arrested on a warrant against the Hon. Arthur Verney, and went away, protesting it was a false arrest, to the Fleet.

Things now looked very awful, and he wrote to Mr. Larkin at his hotel, begging of him to come and satisfy "some fools" that he was Mr. Dingwell. But Jos Larkin was not at his inn. He had not been there that day, and Dingwell began to think that Jos Larkin had, perhaps, told the truth for once, and was actually at Brighton. Well, one night in the Fleet was not very much; Larkin would appear next morning, and Larkin could, of course, manage the question of identity, and settle everything easily, and they would shake hands, and make it up. Mr. Dingwell wondered why they had not brought him to a sponging-house, but direct to the prison. But as things were done under the advice of Mr. Jos Larkin, in whom I have every confidence, I suppose there was a reason.

Mr. Dingwell was of a nature which danger excites rather than cows. The sense of adventure was uppermost. The situation by an odd reaction stimulated his spirits, and he grew frolicsome. He felt a recklessness that recalled his youth. He went down to the flagged yard, and made an acquaintance or two, one in slippers and dressing-gown, another in an evening coat buttoned across his breast, and without much show of shirt. "Very amusing and gentlemanlike men," he thought, "though out at elbows a little;" and not caring for solitude, he invited them to his room, to supper; and they sat up late; and the gentleman in the black evening coat—an actor in difficulties—turned out to be a clever mimic, an inimitable singer of comic songs, and an admirable *raconteur*—"a very much cleverer man than the Prime Minister, egad!" said Mr. Dingwell.

One does see very clever fellows in odd situations. The race is not always to the swift. The moral qualities have something to do with it, and industry everything; and thus very dull fellows are often in very high places. The curse implies a blessing to the man who accepts its

condition. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." Labour is the curse and the *qualification*, also; and so the dullard who toils shall beat the genius who idles.

Dingwell enjoyed it vastly, and *lent* the pleasant fellow a pound, and got to his bed at three o'clock in the morning, glad to have cheated so much of the night. But tired as he was by his journey of the night before, he could not sleep till near six o'clock, when he fell into a doze, and from it he was wakened oddly.

It was by Mr. Jos Larkin's "second move." Mr. Larkin has great malice, but greater prudence. No one likes better to give the man who has disappointed him a knock, the condition being that he disturbs no interest of his own by so doing. Where there is a proper consideration, no man is more forgiving. Where interest and revenge point the same way, he hits very hard indeed.

Mr. Larkin had surveyed the position carefully. The judgment of the criminal court was still on record, *nullum tempus occurrit*, &c. It was a case in which a pardon was very unlikely. There was but one way of placing the head of the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney firmly in the vacant coronet, and of establishing him, Jos Larkin, esq., of the Lodge, in the valuable management of the estates and affairs of that wealthy peerage. It was by dropping the extinguisher upon the flame of that solitary lamp, the Hon. Arthur Verney. Of course Jos Larkin's hand must not appear. He himself communicated with no official person. That was managed easily and adroitly.

He wrote, too, from Brighton to Lord Verney at Malory, the day after his interview with that ex-nobleman, expressing "the most serious uneasiness, in consequence of having learned from a London legal acquaintance at Brighton, that a report prevailed in certain quarters of the city, that the person styling himself Mr. Dingwell had proved to be the Hon. Arthur Verney, and that the Verney peerage was, in consequence, once more on the shelf. "I treated this report slightly, in very serious alarm notwithstanding for your brother's safety," wrote Mr. Larkin, "and your lordship will pardon my expressing my regret that you should have mentioned, until the Hon. Arthur Verney had secured an asylum outside England, the fact of his being still living, which has filled the town unfortunately with conjecture and speculation of a most startling nature. I was shocked to see him this morning on the public platform of the railway, where, very possibly, he was recognised. It is incredible how many years are needed to obliterate recollection by the hand of time. I quietly entreated him to conceal his face a little, a precaution which, I am happy to add, he adopted. I am quite clear that he should leave London as expeditiously and secretly as possible, for some sequestered spot in France, where he can, without danger, await your lordship's decision as to plans for his ultimate safety. May I entreat your lordship's instantaneous attention to this most urgent and alarming subject. I shall be in town to-morrow evening, where my usual address will reach me, and I shall, without a moment's delay, apply myself to carry out whatever your lordship's instructions may direct."

"Yes, he has an idea of my judgment—about it," said Lord Verney when he had read this letter, "and a feeling about the family—very loyal—yes, he's a very loyal person; I shall turn it over, I will—I'll write to him."

Mr. Dingwell, however, had been wakened by two officers with a warrant by which they were ordered to take his body and consign it to a gaoler. Mr. Dingwell read it, and his instinct told him that Jos Larkin was at the bottom of his misfortune, and his heart sunk.

"Very well, gentlemen," said he, briskly, "very good; it is not for me; my name is Dingwell, and my solicitor is Mr. Jos Larkin, and all will be right. I must get my clothes on, if you please."

And he sat up in the bed, and bit his lip, and raised his eyebrows, and shrugged his shoulders drearily.

"Poor Linnet—ay, ay—she was not very wise, but the only one—I've been a great fool—let us try."

There came over his face a look of inexpressible fatigue and something like resignation—and he looked all at once ten years older.

"I'll be with you, I'll be with you, gentlemen," he said very gently.

There was a flask with some noyeau

in it, relics of last night's merry-making, to which these gentlemen took the liberty of helping themselves.

When they looked again at their prisoner he was lying nearly on his face in a profound sleep, his chin on his chest.

"Choice stuff—smell o' nuts in it," said Constable Ruddle, licking his lips. "Git up, sir; ye can take a nap when you git there."

There was a little phial in the old man's fingers; the smell of kernels was stronger about the pillow. "The old man of the mountains" was in a deep sleep, the deepest of all sleeps—death.

CHAPTER LXIX.

CONCLUSION.

And now all things with which, in these pages, we are concerned, are come to that point at which they are best settled in a very few words.

The *one* point required to establish Sedley's claim to the peerage—the validity of the marriage—had been supplied by old Arthur Verney, as we have seen, the night before his death.

The late Lord Verney of unscrupulous memory, Arthur's father, had, it was believed, induced Captain Sedley, in whose charge the infant had been placed, to pretend its death, and send the child in reality to France, where it had been nursed and brought up as his. He was dependent for his means of existence upon his employment as manager of his estates under Lord Verney; and he dared not, it was thought, from some brief expressions in a troubled letter among the papers placed by old Mrs. Mervyn in Wynne Williams's hands, notwithstanding many qualms of conscience, disobey Lord Verney. And he was quieted further by the solemn assurance that the question of the validity of the pretended marriage had been thoroughly sifted, and that it was proved to have been a nullity.

He carefully kept, however, such papers as were in his possession respecting the identity of the child, and added a short statement of his own. If that old Lord Verney had suspected the truth that the marriage was valid, as it afterwards proved, he was the only member of his family who did so. The rest had believed honestly the story that it was fraudulent and illusory. The apparent proof of the child's death had put an end to all interest in further investigating the question, and so the matter rested, until time and events brought all to light.

The dream that made Malory beautiful in my eyes is over. The image of that young fair face—the fair beautiful lady of the chestnut hair and great hazel eyes haunts its dark woods less palpably, and the glowing shadow fades, year by year, away.

In sunny Italy, where her mother was born, those eyes having looked their last on Cleve and on "the boy," and up in clouded hope to heaven—were closed, and the slender bones repose. "I think, Cleve, you'll sometimes remember your poor Margaret. I know you'll always be very kind to the little boy—*our* darling, and if you marry again, Cleve, *she'll* not be a trouble to you, as I have been; and you said, you'll sometimes think of me. You'll forget all my jealousy, and temper, and folly, and you'll say —'Ah, she loved me.'"

And these last words return, though the lips that spoke them come no more; and he *is* very kind to that handsome boy—frank, generous, and fiery like her, with the great hazel eyes and beautiful tints, and the fine and true affections. At times comes something in the smile, in the tone as he talks, in the laugh that thrills his heart with a strange yearning and agony. Vain remorse! vain the yearnings; for the last words are spoken and heard; not one word *more* while the heavens remain, and mortals people the earth!

Sedley—Lord Verney we should style him—will never be a politician, but he has turned out a thoroughly useful business-like and genial country gentleman. Agnes, now Lady Verney, is, I will not say how happy; I only hope not too happy.

Need I say that the cloud that lowered for a while over the house of Hazelden has quite melted into air, and that the sun never shone brighter

on that sweet landscape. Miss Etherage is a great heiress now, for Sedley, as for sake of clearness I call him still, refused a *dot* with his wife, and that handsome inheritance, will all belong to Charity, who is as emphatic, obstinate, and kind-hearted as ever. The admiral has never gone down the mill-road since his introduction to the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney at the foot of the hill. He rolls in his chair safely along the level up-lands, and amuses himself with occasional inspections of Ware through his telescope; and tells little Agnes, when he sees her, what she was doing on a certain day, and asks who the party with the phaeton and grays, who called on Thursday at two o'clock, were, and similar questions; and likes to hear the news, and they say is growing more curious as years increase. He and Charity have revived their acquaintance with *écarté* and *piquet*, and play for an hour or so very snugly in the winter evenings. Miss Charity is a little cross when she loses, and won't let old Etherage play more than his allotted number of games; and locks up the cards; and is growing wife-like with the admiral; but is quite devoted to him, and will make him live, I think, six years longer than anyone else could.

Sedley wrote a very kind letter to the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, to set his mind at ease about *mesne rates*, and any other claims whatsoever that might arise against him, in consequence of his temporary tenure of the title and estates, and received from Vichy a very affronted reply, begging him to take whatever course he might be advised, as he distinctly objected to being placed under any kind of personal obligation, and trusted that he would not seek to place such a construction upon a compulsory respect for the equities of the situation, and the decencies enforced by public opinion; and he declared his readiness to make any sacrifice to pay him whatever his strict legal rights entitled him to the moment he had made up his mind to exact them.

The Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney is, of course, quite removed from his sphere of usefulness and distinction —parliamentary life—and spends his time upon the Continent, and is remarkably reserved and impertinent, and regarded with very general respect and hatred.

Sedley has been very kind, for Cleve's sake, to old Sir Booth Fanshawe, with whom he is the only person on earth who has an influence.

He wrote to the baronet, who was then in Paris, disclosing the secret of Cleve's marriage. The old man burst into one of his frenzies, and wrote forthwith a frantic letter direct to his mortal enemy, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, railing at Cleve, railing at *him*, and calling upon him, in a tone of preposterous menace, to punish his nephew! Had he been left to himself, I dare say he would have made Cleve feel his resentment. But thus bullied he said—"Upon my life I'll do no such thing. I'm in the habit of thinking before I take steps, about it—with Booth Fanshawe's permission, I'll act according to my own judgment, and I dare say the girl has got some money, and if it were not good for Cleve in some way that old person would not be so angry." And so it ended for the present.

The new Lord Verney went over expressly to see him, and in the same conversation, in which he arranged some law business in the friendliest way, and entirely to Sir Booth Fanshawe's satisfaction, he discussed the question of Cleve's marriage. At first the baronet was incensed; but when the hurly-burly was done he came to see, with our friend Tom, whose peerage gave his opinion weight on the subject of marriages and family relations, that the alliance was not so bad, on the contrary, that it had some very strong points to recommend it.

The Rev. Isaac Dixie has not got on in the Church, and is somehow no favourite at Ware. The Hon. Miss Caroline Oldys is still unmarried, and very bitter on the Verneys, uncle and nephew; people don't understand why, though the reader may. Perhaps she thinks that the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney ought to have tried again, and was too ready to accept a first refusal. Her hatred of Cleve I need not explain.

With respect to Mr. Larkin, I cite an old Dutch proverb, which says, "Those who swim deep and climb high seldom die in their beds." In

its fair figurative sense it applies satisfactorily to the case of that profound and aspiring gentleman who, as some of my readers are aware, fell at last from a high round of the ladder of his ambition, and was drowned in the sea beneath. No—not drowned; that were too painless, and implies extinction. He fell, rather, upon that black flooring of rock that rims the water, and was smashed, but not killed.

It was, as they will remember, after his introduction to the management of the affairs of the Wylder, Brandon, and Lake families, and on the eve, to all appearance, of the splendid consummation of his subtle and audacious schemes, that in a moment the whole scaffolding of his villainy gave way, and he fell headlong—thenceforth, helpless, sprawling, backbroken, living on from year to year, and eating metaphoric dust, like the great old reptile who is as yet mangled but not killed.

Happy fly the years at Ware. Many fair children have blessed the union of pretty Agnes Etherage and the kindly heir of the Verneys. Cleve does not come himself; he goes little to any gay country houses. A kind of lassitude or melancholy is settling and deepening upon him. To one passage of his life he looks back with a quickly averted glance, and an unchanging horror—the time when he was saved from a great crime, as it were, by the turning of a die. "Those three dreadful weeks," he says within himself, "when I was *mad!*" But his handsome son is constantly at Ware, where he is beloved by its master and mistress like one of their own children. One day Lord Verney ran across to Malory in his yacht, this boy with him. It was an accidental *tetê-à-tetê*, and he talked to the boy a great deal of his "poor mamma" as they sauntered through the sunny woods of Malory; and he brought him to the refectory, and pointed out to him from the window, the spot where he had seen her, with her trowel in her hand, as the morning sun threw the shadow of the spreading foliage over her, and he described her beauty to him, and he walked down with him to Cardyllian, the yacht was appointed to meet them at the pier, and brought him into the church, to the pew where he was placed, and showed him the seat where she and Anne Sheckleton sat on the Sunday when he saw her first, and looked for a while silently into that void shadow, for it is pleasant and yet sad to call up sometimes those old scenes and images that have made us feel, when we were younger, and somehow good Lady Verney did not care to hear her husband upon this theme.

So for the present the story of the Verneys of Malory is told. Years hence, when we shall not be here to read it, the same scenes and family may have a new story to tell; for time with his shuttle and the threads of fate, is ever weaving new romance.

SONG.

RICH notes from a contralto voice,
  Loving, laughing eyes,
Some one list'ning to those notes—
  Sunlight in the skies.

Sad notes from a contralto voice,
  Tear drops in the eyes,
None to listen to those notes—
  Twilight in those skies.

No sound from that contralto voice,
  Closed for aye those eyes,
Some one pining for those notes—
  Darkness in the skies.

Glad notes from a contralto voice,
  Glory in those eyes,
Some one dreaming hears those notes—
  Dawn is in the skies.

"MOINEAU."